ISSN 0313-20

Theatre Australia

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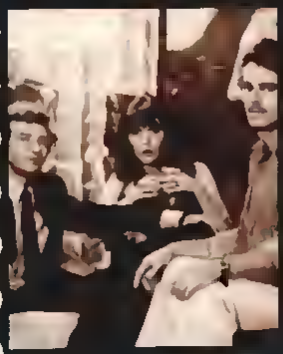

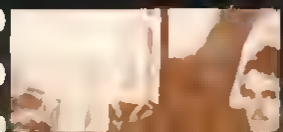

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From Play to Film

VOL 1 NO 5

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Theatre -Australia

ISSN 0313-2080

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

Nov-Dec, 1976

CONTENTS

THEATRE AUSTRALIA is published by Theatre Publications Ltd, 7 President Place New Lambton Heights, New South Wales 2305 (Tel 049 52597B) on the 19th of every month. It is distributed by subscription and through theatre foyers etc., by Theatre Publications and to newsagents throughout Australia by Gordon and Gotch (A'asia) Ltd, MELBOURNE SYDNEY Printed by Newey & Beath Pty. Ltd., 10 Belford St., Broadmeadow, 2292 Newcastle N.S.W. ADVERTISING AGENTS. TREWEEKE DURNFORD ASS. N. Sydney Tel. (02) 92-0247

EDITORIAL

The grant allocations have been decided for another year and inevitably there are the usual winges especially this time when, in real terms, the purse strings are tighter.

Our Concern is about the octopus growth of the state theatre companies when the smaller theatre companies are fighting for survival. A fight which forces them, on their relatively miniscule grants, to go for commerical successes and thus prompts the question of why they should be subsidised anyway. A vicious circle.

The point of subsidy is surely to provide the right to fail in a long term search for our dramatic indentity. Its purpose is not to fund empire building on the one hand and force necessary, and disoriented, compromise on the other. There is no possibility of healthy competition in such a situation.

Tyrone Guthrie, back in 1970, predicted that very shortly Australia would be supporting only one professional company in each state with all the rest being forced to turn amateur. Despite the emergence of the Australia Council as the prime central funding organisation for the Arts, it is still on the cards because of the disparity between state company grants and the rest.

A given production should cost as much for any theatre to mount so why, for instance, should Nimrod, the closest rival to the Tote, receive only one fifth of the state company's grant? Alastair Duncan believes that the grant for Sydney's Marian Street ($40,000) doesn't allow room for one slip-up in choice of programme.

State companies already have an enormous head start. It will be a sorry day for Australian theatre if they ever achieve the monopoly situation to which they are heading and which some seem deliberately to want.

WITH THANKS

It is a welcome task and one appropriate to the time of year to thank the many people who have made *Theatre Australia* possible. The only onerous part is that the list would be too long if we were to include eveyone by name.

Grateful thanks must go to our staff, contributors, advisory board, representatives and printers. To the theatre companies especially Nimrod, H V T C, A.P.G., National Theatre Perth, and M T C Grant Street (twice!), for benefit nights. To David Williamson, Philip Persons, Katharine Brisbane, Dorothy Hewett, Graeme Blundell, Jenny Renkin and Marlis Thiersch, for having so much faith in the magazine as to have contributed financially or guaranteed the magazine. For services and involvement in kind, W A Enright & Sons, Ellen Braye, the University of Newcastle, and M & L Casting. The Rt Hon Anthony Staley, John Mostyn and Bob Adams for sympathetic discussions at a Federal level, to the State cultural departments and N S W Drama Foundation who will be helping the Magazine in 1977.

Theatre Guid

DECEMBER 1976/7 JAN

A.C.T.

CANBERRA THEATRE CENTRE (49 8211)

Playhouse
Rumplestiltskin by the Alphe Theatre (Dec 15th 18th)
Canberra Repertory Society s
Equus by Peter Shaffer
Directed by Ross McGregor (Dec 20th 23rd)
Canberra Theatre
Superstar in Review, with Jon English and Trevor White (Dec 17th)
Latvian Arts Festival (Dec 28th 30th)

THEATRE THREE (47 4222)

Canberra Repertory Society
Cabaret
Directed by Ross McGregor
Designed by Russell Brown (to Dec 18th)

NEW SOUTH WALES:

ABORIGINAL ARTS AND CULTURE CENTRE (699 2619)

Here Comes the Nigger by G L Bostock
Directed by Jack Charles (to Dec 18th)
The Trials of Sylvester written and directed by Lorraine Mafr–Williams (Mid Dec , 3 4 weeks)

ACTORS COMPANY (660 2503)

And Now at Last The Nibble Nobbys Nuts Show
By Ray Berkler and Derry Blazer
Directed by Rodney Deleney (from Dec 9th)
Winnie the Pooh by A A Milne
Directed by Matthew O Sullivan (Dec 17th Jan 15th)

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE (51 3841)

Piano Speak to Me by Rodney Stewart
Directed by John Howitt (from Mid Jan)

BALMAIN BIJOU (827 3652)

Wonderwoman by Reg Livermore
Directed by Peter Batey (continuing)

BONAPARTE'S THEATRE RESTUARANT (357 255)

The Puddin' Club (Same Drfference) Book by Morry Swerdlin Words and Music by Steve Fenton
with Al Thomas , Gordon Glenwright , Valerie Newstead, David Goddard, Christine Cameron, Paul Woods (continuing)

CAROUSEL (358 2333)

Hello Hollywood
Tracey Lee (to Dec 31st)

ENSEMBLE (929 8877)

California Suite by Neil Simon
Directed by Hayes Gordon (continuing)

GENESIAN (827 3023)

Gaslight by Patrick Hamilton
Directed by John Williams (to Dec 31st)
Serk by Ben Travers
Directed by Kevin Jackson
Designed by Philip Ritchie (open Mid Jan)

HER MAJESTY'S (212 1066)

Private Lives by Noel Coward
Directed by Robert Chetwyn (to Dec 18th)

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY NEWCASTLE (26 2526)

Re-open 26th February

INDEPENDENT (929 7377)

Opus Theatre Group
The Star Spangled Girl by Neil Simon
Directed by Frank Haine (Dec 15th – Jan 22nd)
Adventures of Iskybibble by Stuart Smith and Martin Erdman Directed by Ray Ainsworth (Dec 4th Jan 31st Sats)

KILLARA 680 COFFEE THEATRE (488 7552)

Memories A Tribute to Ten Years
Devised by John Howitt (continuing)

MARIAN STREET (498 3166)

Tarantara! Tarantara! Gilbert & Sullivan Music Revue
Directed by Ted Craig (to Dec 22nd)
The Last Bunyip by Wendy Blaxland
Directed by Audrey Blaxland (Jan 4th 15th, 11 00 & 1 30)

MINERVA (358 1221)

Saturday Night at the Tiv Chelsea Brown (to Dec 31st)

MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (909 8222)

The Beast of Belgrave Square written and directed by Stanley Walsh (continuing)

NEW ARTS THEATRE, Glebe (660 3922)

The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin by Steve J Spears Directed by Richard Wherrett starring Gordon Chater (continuing)

NEW THEATRE (519 3403)

Falling Apart by Monte Merrick
Directed by Brian Syron (to Dec 18th)
Caucasian Chalk Circle By Bertolt Brecht
Directed by David Cisek (from Jan 15th)

NIMROD (69 5003)

Upstairs *A handful of Friends* by David Williamson
Directed by John Bell (to Jan 8th) *Young Mo* by Steve Spears
Directed by Richard Wherrett (from Jan 15th)
Downstairs *Dirty Linen* by Tom Stoppard
Directed by Ken Horler (Dec 17th Jan 15th)
Rodd Island *Treasure Island* adapted and Directed by Ken Horler (Mid – Jan)

OLD TOTE (633 6122)

Drama Theatre *The Magistrate* by Arthur Wing Pinero
Directed by Peter Collingwood
(Jan 1st Feb 15th)
Parade Theatre Rookery Nook by Ben Travers
Directed by Bill Redmond (to Jan 11th)
The Father by August Strindberg
(Feb 9th March 29th)

A T.Y.P.

Summertime Youth Theatre (Jan 10th for 2 weeks)
Nine Sweetdays production for Sydney Festival (Jan 12th 22nd)

SEYMOUR CENTRE (692 0555)

Downstairs Jeral Puppets *Murgatroyd & Fleabag*
presented by Jackie and John Lewis (Dec 27th Jan 7th)
A Nightingale Still Sings in Berkely Square
Colleen Clifford
Directed by Peter Williams (Jan 3rd Jan 15th)
York *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll
Directed by William Orr (Dec 27th Jan 29th)
Everest *The Magic Show*
International Brotherhood of Magicians (Dec 28th 30th)
Hypnotistics Spectacular with Zolten (Dec 29th - 30th)
Michael Aspinal , Musical Satirist (Jan 10th 29th)

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6577)

Dead Eyed Dicks by Peter King
Directed by Peter O'Toole (to Dec 18th)

QUEENSLAND

ACTORS THEATRE (349 4026)

At the Conservatorium of Music Theatre
The Misanthrope by Tony Harrison after Moliere
Directed by David Glendinning (to Dec 11th)

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)

Carousel by Rogers and Hammerstein
Directed by Andrew McKelvey & Robyn Fowler (to Dec 24th)

LA BOITE (36 2296)

How Could You Believe Me When I Said I'd Be Your Valet When You Know I've Been A Liar All My Life? by John Bell after Goldoni
Directed by Graeme Johnston (to Dec 18th)
The Sea by Edward Bond
Directed by David Bell (Jan 21st Feb 12th)

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 3861)

And the Big Men Fly by Alan Hopgood
Directed by James Ridewood (to Dec 18th)
Closed until Feb 9th

RY

TWELFTH NIGHT (52 5889)
Closed until March except for (day) children s workshops

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE (87 5777)
Adelaide Repertory Company
Who Goes Bare by Richard Harris & Leslie Darbon
Directed by Murray George (to Dec 18th)

FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 2292)
Space *El Grande de Coca Cola* from an idea by Ron House and Drz White
Directed by Joe Latona
Playhouse (and see S A T C)
Mr Fat Friend by Charles Laurence
Directed by Christopher Brown (Jan 20th-Feb 19th)

Q THEATRE (223 5651/278 2319)
Workshop Production

SHERIDAN (267 3751 evngs)
Adelaide Theatre Group
Jack the Ripper by Ron Pember and Dennis de Marne
Directed by Brian Debnam (to Dec 18th)
A Christmas Carol adapted by Betty Quinn
Directed by Trevor Johnson (to Dec 18th)

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY (51 5151)
Happy Landings by Michael Cove
Directed by George Ogilvie (to Dec 18th)
Old King Cole by Ken Campbell
Directed by Roger Chapman (Dec 28th - Jan 15th)

TASMANIA

HOBART REPERTORY THEATRE
Jack and the Beanstalk (to Dec 17th)

THEATRE ROYAL
The Apprentice Theatre
Winnie the Pooh by A A Milne (to Dec 11th)

VICTORIA

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)
Front Theatre *The Dudders* by John Romeril & John Timlin
Directed by John Romeril (to Dec 24th)
Eugene Knox in a Programme of Dance (Jan 7th 22nd)
Back Theatre *A Stretch of the Imagination* by Jack Hibberd
Directed by Paul Hampton (to Dec 24th)
St Marks Hall *The Young Peer Gynt* from Henrik Ibsen
Directed by Jenny Kemp (to Dec 24th)

HER MAJESTY'S (663 3211)
Snow White
Mounted by Rudas Organisation Sydney (Jan 3rd 30th)

LA MAMA (347 6085)
Still Life by James Claydon
Directed by James Claydon (to Dec 19th)

LAST LAUGH (419 6228)
Crackers at the Savoy by Garrie Hutchinson (to Mid Jan)

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (645 1100)
Russell Street *Other Times* by Ray Lawler
Directed by John Sumner
Designed by Anne Fraser (Dec 16th Jan 22nd)
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler
Directed by John Sumner (Jan 24th Feb 5th)
St Martins *Cry Sugar* by Stephen Poliakoff
Directed by Ian Giles (to Jan 8th)
Game of Love and *Chance* by Pierre de Marivaux
Directed by Mick Rodger (Jan 13th Mar 5th)
Grant Street *Chidley* by Alma de Groen
Directed by Garrie Hutchinson

REGENT PALACE
The Rocky Horror Show (continuing)

WINDSOR REGIS (51 6979)
The Naked Vicar Show by Tony Settler
Directed By Gil Tucker (to Jan 31st) and Gary Riley

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

HOLE IN THE WALL (81 2403)
Mixed Doubles by Harold Pinter Alan Ayckbourne, James Saunders and Others
Directed by John Milson (to Jan 1st)
How Does Your Garden Grow? by Jim McNeil
Directed by Aarne Neeme (from Jan 15th)

PLAYHOUSE (25 3344)
Closed for Renovations until 7th Feb
The Plough and Stars, Old Tote Production (opens Feb 7th)

QUOTES A

FIRST AUSTRALIAN TRILOGY

"It is an enthralling experience to direct Ray Lawler's trilogy *(Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, Kid Skates, Other Times)* the first I believe by an Australian Its strength will be seen on Saturdays February 12th and February 19th when audiences will have the unique experience of following the characters through seventeen years, not just the generation of one play."

John Sumner, Artistic Director, Melbourne Theatre Company

SHARMAN TO DIRECT ANOTHER WHITE

After *The Season at Sarsaparilla* Jim Sharman is to work on another Patrick White script "This time it's for a film based on a short story *The Night ... The Prowler* I'm preparing the film for shooting at the end of next year with producer Tony Buckley" And the theatre? "Between now and then I will be doing another production but I haven't decided as yet what it will be"

(See Jim Sharman in dialogue with Rex Cramphorn Page 38)

SUSANNAH'S COMPLAINT

Susannah York hasn't much acquaintance with Australian plays She's been too busy working here for that But she was impressed by David Williamson's script for *Elias Fraser*, "once I'd got used to its idiosyncrasies Every language has its own"

The peculiarities of the star system intrigue her In England Peter O'Toole wouldn't automatically have them flocking in as he does here "There is the thought 'they'll do another' But people don't honour their stars enough, which is perhaps the problem for Australian actors at home"

She doesn't feel that she should be feted as a matter of course, "I don't believe in the Hollywood mentality entertainers have to woo their public" And Australian audiences? "They're very honest It's shameful that one should be affected by one's personal life that day, but if one is, the audiences are susceptible And if they don't like you, you know it"

Which brings us to Susannah's big beef - the booking system "It's incredible, people can only book two weeks in advance and then they're told we're booked out when we aren't Actors work their socks off and its all the harder when the agency allocations or whatever prevents us reaching some of the ordinary people who want to come to *Private Lives* !!

CRITICS SELF - CRITICISM

Perhaps the most interesting thing about directing Aime de Groen's *Chidley* is the difference between working with actors and a text, and sitting in a theatre and watching how a play fits into one's current version of the history and theory of the theatre Doing it is much more difficult than watching and pounding the typewriter Whatever the relative importance of intellectual constructs in viewing a performance they certainly fly out the window in the rehearsal room It is very easy for a critic (I do it all the time myself) to more or less at random pick a theory or an artistic movement (like Expressionism, say itself an artificial construct of critics) and impose it on a production It's much harder to find a style out of what once appeared to be a clear analysis of a misunderstood prophet in Australia, but now is a huge array of individual lines and actors problems I mean, no critic in the world has ever spent six weeks reading and discussing a play over and over again Unless, of course he is a believer in the John Lahr dirty hand theory of criticism.

It's a big help working with tolerant, experienced and inventive actors, as I am, but there is still a gap between what I say, and what they say and what actually happens We talk about, for instance motivational aspects of a character

Garrie Hutchinson, Graeme Blundell and Carillo

LETTERS TO

Dear Sirs,

Marlies Thiersch's *Women In Australian Theatre* (T A , Nov Dec 1976, pp 46 7) contains so many errors that her apology in-advance seems eminently justified Among them

The Currency Lass was performed at the Royal Victorian George Coppin was not, in fact, "The Father of the Australian Theatre", though several writers have so described him the accolade rightly belongs to Barnett Levey who established Sydney's first Theatre Royal in 1833 Maggie Moore and J.C Williamson did not first come to Australia in 1873, they arrived on 1st July, 1874 In comparing Melba and Nellie Stewart, Ms Thiersch says, "Recently two plays have been written, by men, about Melba, but Nellie Stewart wrote her life's story herself"' Melba too, wrote an autobiography *Melodies and Memories*, published in 1925 And mention should have been made of Majorie Smith's biography of Nellie Stewart, *Sweet Nell of Old Sydney*, published in 1973 The Duke of Orleans with whom Melba was associated was Philippe, not Louis Philippe, who had died in 1850 And Melba did not "Come back to Australia to become Dame Nellie in 1918" She returned to her homeland many times, finally in 1930 she was in the United States when she heard that she had been created D B E. Nelle Kolle was an established music hall star in England before she came to Australia to settle around 1914 Gladys Moncrieff's most famous role was not *The Merry Widow*, but *The Maid of the Mountains*. She died not in 1975, but on 8th February, 1976 Was Kitty Carroll really a "well known performer in her own right"? Perhaps Ms Thiersch could give us a resume of her career It is Diane Cilento, not Dianne who achieved success abroad, and Googie Withers was born in India not in England

But Ms Thiersch's sins of omission are worse than her sins of commission What about soprano Gertrude Johnson who returned from fame in England to found the National Theatre Movement in Melbourne Frances Alda, the world famous New Zealand born diva, whose early career was on the Australian musical comedy stage as Francis Adler, actress Doris Fitton, who established the Independent Theatre in Sydney, Kathleen Robinson, philanthropic founder of Whitehall Productions, Queenie Paul, who, with husband Mike Connors, was responsible for the survival of Australian vaudeville during the depression, and who founded the second Tivoli Circuit Nancye Stewart, Nellie's daughter, who had a distinguished career both here and overseas, Irene Mitchell, for so long associated with the Melbourne Little Theatre (later St Martin's) both as an actress and as producer and director Dorothy Brunton, Vera Pearce and June Bronhill, stars of musical comedy (and in Miss Bronhill's case, opera), both here and in London Nancy Brown, who had a sparkling career in the West End, starred in the film version of *The Maid of the Mountains*, and, later, with her husband Albert Arlen wrote the book and lyrics of the highly successful musical version of *The Sentimental Bloke*, Varney Monk, who contributed to the excellence of several Australian musicals, notably *Collits' Inn*, Minnie Everett a talented choreographer and director, who worked with J C Williamsons for many years, Therese Desmond radio actress and prolific scriptwriter she wrote and starred in *Fred and Maggie Everybody* for many years, Dame Joan Hammond, internationally famous soprano

D QUERIES

Grant St Photo David Parker

and resolve it in an ad hoc way, or discuss the mechanics of Chidley's extraordinary theory of coitus, or even the importance of the background of violence and death to his ideas of violence and sexuality, but the walk across the floor, the vocal tone or the look across the room is in another league But there it is Once you start worrying about metaphysics and epistimology you can never stop But those concerns however important they are to talk about are from another language, not wholly the language of the theatre **Garrie Hutchinson**

A FIRST FOR JOAN?

George Ogilive will be directing *Lucrezia Borgia* for the Australian Opera with Joan Sutherland Is this the first time Joan Sutherland has been directed by an Australian in her own country?

AMERICAN LINE UP

Surely it was known that they were bringing in an all-overseas cast for *A Chorus Line* so why are they holding extensive auditions in Australia? Just to satisfy Equity? After all the hoo ha about Australian actor Tony Bart being refused a part in the American International production and the mass importation of English actors in *Dead Eyed Dicks*, sham auditions, if that's what they are go no way towards solving the deeper problem

BILL REDMOND BACK AT THE TOTE?

Is it true that Michael Langham, Marrietta's bet for the new Tote Artistic Director, will not be available for eighteen months and that Bill Redmond has been asked to stay on for the time being?

ANGER ABOUT AWGIES

By giving out four Awgies this year instead of about twelve the Guild has shown scorn for its members By giving none for stage plays it has agreed with the I A C that the live theatre does not deserve support By giving two to the adaptions of novels whilst excluding the novelists themselves, both of whom are still alive, they have shown themselves to be idiots By giving one to a citizen of New Zealand, now resident there they have shown enormous prejudice against the creative artists of Tonga and Fiji The fourth award was well deserved By not ringing David Williamson, Alex Buzo Dorothy Hewett and Ron Blair and asking them to put in plays they have shown themselves to be incompetent Their conduct is amazing I suggest they hand out four more beleted awards if they don't they deserve extinction

Bob Ellis

GARRY McDONALD TO PLAY MD

Following the enormous success of Stephen J Spears' *Elocution of Benjamin Franklin*, the Nimrod Theatre will present *Young Mo* by Spears as its new year offering

Playing the title role will be Garry McDonald Why did he accept this part?

"Well to be quite honest, it was right in the middle of the third Norman Gunston series and I was desperate to do something else Gunston was driving me up the wall "

Would he have taken anything to escape his alter ego for a while?

"Oh no not in theatre I have no inkling to be a theatre actor again It was just that I enjoyed the play "

Will audiences come to see an extension of the Norman Gunston character?

" I guess so," laughs Gary, "But it won t be anything like that at all

He's nothing like Norman - he's a bit coarser "

Young Mo opens at the Nimrod for a six week season on January 15th The script will be published in the February edition of Theatre Australia

Barry Eaton

THE EDITOR

and until recently, artistic adviser for the Victorian Opera Company, and the great Neva Carr Glyn, mother of Nick Tate, who had a long and notable career on stage and in radio and films And there are many more

Sincerely,
Frank Van Straten,
South Yarra Victoria

Marlis Thiersch is interested by and thankful for this reply and invites the readers to comment upon her two articles, which as a general survey cannot be all inclusive — Ed

Dear Sir,

I refer to the article in the October/November issue of *Theatre Australia* on the S G I O Theatre by your correspondent Richard Fotheringham

In the interests of truth may I point out a few errors

(i) The theatre seats 619 not 615

(ii) The Q T C's subscription scheme does not cost as much as the ticket sales it produces In 1975 total subscription expenditure (including salaries) was $20 627 which produced $62 170 in ticket revenue and in 1976 $18 876 which produced $75 156 in ticket revenue

(iii) The Q T C is 'allowed to get out' of the S G I O theatre and has done so on several occasions having played at Twelfth Night Theatre La Boite and the Arts Theatre

(iv) The Q T C's average attendance during the fiscal year 1975/76 was 75 24% of capacity not 50%

Errors might have been avoided had your correspondent paid the Q T C the courtesy of consulting with us, (as the principal user of the theatre) before committing himself to print

Yours sincerely
Alan Edwards
Director Queensland Theatre Company

Dear Sir,

In reference to your review *(Theatre Australia*, Oct/Nov 1976) of *Equus* by Roger Pulvers I would like to make a few comments Firstly, this is hardly what I would call a review no basis, constructive criticism or well constructed argument

Perhaps it has not occurred to the reviewer, but the reason *Equus* has always been the same with the same set same technique same spirit and virtually the same character interpretation' is not- as stated that the original production was perhaps so good- but that the play carries with it very explicit stage directions character interpretation and technique ideas with precise notes on stage setting

The 'un-horsey sound' as it was referred to is there to herald or illustrate the presence of Equus the God' (Peter Shaffer *Equus*) The clomping of the feet was intentional (or perhaps Mr Pulvers didn't quite understand this)

The idea of writing *Equi* may give this naive writer a sense of superiority, but as any first form Latin student would know this is nothing special

The time taken for the reviewer to write the plural *Equi* would have been better spent reading, or considering the play more thoroughly

Sincerely
Romola M Wearn
Bellevue Hill, N S W

SpotlighT

After the recent uncertainties, Currency Press is delighted to announce a new partnership with Cambridge University Press, who will hold the stock and handle distribution. Not only does this mean a sigh of relief and an assured future, but also the happy fact that Currency will now straddle both Melbourne and Sydney.

o

They are tight lipped at Twelfth Night Theatre about the new situation brought about by State ownership of the theatre, props etc with the company as the major tenants. Discussions are going on on three levels, Federal, State and within the company, but whatever their outcome, Twelfth Night's future, according to Jeremy Muir Smith, is assured and will open the 1977 season in March.

o

Asrne Neeme is to be guest director at the Hole in the Wall theatre, Perth, for the production of Jim McNeil's *How Does Your Garden Grow* scheduled for January. During the same period prisoners from Fremantle Gaol will be workshopping and performing McNeil's *The Chocolate Frog* as part of the Hole's Sunday Club nights. John Milsom is said to be delighted as this is the first time the prisoners have performed outside the gaol.

o

The Nimrod held a farewell dinner for Jake Newby, Debby Baile, Larry Eastwood and Mike Manuell which was attended by fifty members and friends at Le Cafe. Six years old on December 2nd, their seventh year can't but see a lot of changes behind the scenes at one of our most popular and progressive theatres.

o

Pity about *More Canterbury Tales* in Melbourne. Seems a case of more being too much. But big things are expected of *A Chorus Line*. With A B C drama budget cuts, the *Tales* debacle means additional cause for concern among theatre people. Some commercial TV productions are said to be in the pipeline.

o

Speculation is running high about the Elizabethan Theatre Trust after the recommendations of the I A C Report and the enquiry into their workings by management consultants. There are those who think the Trust orchestras in Melbourne and Sydney should go to the Ballet and Opera respectively. If so, won't the A E T T just be reduced to a cushioned commercial-entreprenurial role? *Dead Eyed Dicks* might have made them money, but little acclaim for bringing it to Australia. They say it is important to have an organisation capable of touring companies within Australia and arranging loss making cultural exchanges with overseas organisations. But surely this could be done on the one hand by giving the money direct to indigenous companies, and on the other using an organisation with far lower overheads. Mr Geoffrey Joynton Smith, General Manager, did believe this latter area to be one of enormous importance for the Trust, and did say that other more overtly commercial activities were necessary to help fund it. "Our emphasis is on helping Australian theatre". As he also said, until the Trust Board and the Australia Council have considered the report, any comment in the press must remain speculation.

ACTORS' NEWS

Arthur Dignam will be back in Austtelia 6th December. The Prospect Theatre Company has expressed interest in him joining next year.

Michael Kent has lead in *My Fat Friend* to be mounted in Adelaide at the Festival Centre Playhouse from January 20th. Playhouse from January 20th.

Cul Cullen is starring in *The Training Run* directed by brother **Max** at Bondi Pavillion which opens January 14th '77. **John Hargreaves** also in cast.

Alax Archdale opens at Seymour Centre in January with his one-man show as yet untitled — Peter Williams is the producer.

Colleen Clifford is also at Seymour Centre in January with her one-women show *A Nightingale still Sings in Berkely Square* which has just been to Adelaide for three weeks as part of Sydney Festival.

Ron Falk is to appear in *School for Scandal* and *Cherry Orchard* with **Ruth Cracknell** for the South Australian Theatre Company.

Garry Files is appearing in *City Sugar* with the Melbourne Theatre Company at St. Martins until January 8th.

Drew Forsyth is rehearsing *The Magistrate* with Alex Hay for the Old Tote.

Gerry Maguire, after successful David Williamson play, has been requested to join the M T C. next year.

Bruce Spence is appearing with **Merv Drake** in *Arden* at the M T C.

Nancye Hayes and **Greeme Blundell** are to tour *Same Time Next Year* after Christmas, to all main capitals.

Gloria Dawn not fit and well is to join cast of *Young Mo* to play Sadie Gale. **Ray Ritchie**, the composer, has left *The Rocky Horror Show* to handle the musical direction. (See Quotes and Queries for **Garry McDonald** in the title role.)

Chris Amer will be seen in film role in between M T C plays in 1977. Could be the start of big things for a girl who looks as good as she acts.

Indications are that Australian actor **Noel Ferrier** will carry off the main male acting honours for Burstell's *Eliza Fraser*.

Information supplied by our Melbourne, Sydney and Perth correspondents, and M & L Casting Pty. Ltd., Sydney.

KATHARINE BRISBANE ON THE THREAT TO THE

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PLAYWRIGHTS CONFERENCE

At the time of writing the 1977 National Playwright's Conference in Canberra next May is under threat The Theatre Board of the Australia Council, strapped for money, is cutting down to essentials these being the existing theatre companies - and have harshly eliminated the "frills" these being workshops, special projects grants, and grants to struggling small companies which, if allowed to live might grow into larger companies in need of more subsidy The conference committee, I am happy to say, has responded to the knock back with becoming militancy. Others have rallied to its support and planning proceeds in confident determination

In fact each year the grant has been touch and go with the Theatre Board which has always begun at the top with its funding Since 1968 the major concentration has been on development within the big performing arts companies with only secondary attention given to theatre of a more radical kind To quote that much maligned document, the Industries Assistance Commission Draft Report on Assistance to the Performing Arts

"The Commission is not convinced that the existing forms of assistance encourage innovation sufficiently or in the most efficient manner Most importantly their concentration on existing institutions and financial structures is considered likely to have discouraged innovation For example, the Australia Council has stated that its policy is to stimulate new activity and the development of new styles and works, but the amount of funding for such purposes has been relatively insignificant about one per cent of its budget for the performing arts The need to correct their imbalances is one reason for the recommendation that a very much larger proportion of the available assistance should be directed to encouraging innovatory activities

"Innovatory activities should be assisted not only because they constitute a benefit to the community by helping maintain the continuing relevance of the arts but also because it is very likely that without such assistance few will be undertaken There is a need for new works and activities to establish a 'track record' Commercial prudence and conservatism will generally inhibit innovation and the Commission considers that the greater risk associated with innovatory activities should be offset by assistance because of the potential community benefits that can accrue from works of this nature

"Such subventions for innovation should not normally be large, since the cross fertilisation of ideas depends on a large number of initiatives including inevitably a high proportion of failures rather than a few elaborately mounted 'experiments' "

What, then, is the Playwrights' Conference's track record? It has met four years running with a team of actors and directors to work shop some six or seven untried scripts none of which, so far, has proved to be a notable, or even a modest commercial success in the real theatre It certainly stands up to the requirement of a high proportion of failure Its subvention is not normally large at between ten and twenty thousand only a fraction of that one per cent the Australia Council lavishes on innovation But in the matter of the cross fertilisation of ideas compared to the major subsidy holders the Playwright's Conference is an unbeatable bargain

For the conference is that oddity in the theatre a circumstance in which the process is the achievement, not the end product It is the only refuge where actors, authors and directors can achieve failure with honour and carry the lesson to success in other ventures. I suppose this sounds like a paradox but the I A C is, as we all know, absolutely right in stating that commercial prudence and conservatism will generally inhibit innovation And the tougher life becomes in the present political climate, the more conservative will become even the best of our theatres

Why do we need such a conference? And why for playwrights? Don't they have it pretty good anyway? Look at Steve Spears Overnight at 25 on his way to Broadway without a green card And when consolidation is the catch cry, do we want more of them knocking at the doors of our theatres?

Firstly it offers opportunity for innovation unique to the theatre simply by being flexible and free from first-night pressure and the need to tailor your work to a theatre's requirements That this freedom has not really begun to be exploited by the participants does not deduct from the fact that the opportunity is there

Secondly the conference is a portrait in miniature of the profession from which it stems and as such a valuable observation at all levels In 1973 I attended two weeks of the annual four week American National Playwrights' Conference in Connecticut It is a big, intense affair where I watched famous faces and new faces hopeful young people and defeated old ones. I saw a pre-sold musical disembowelled by a Broadway director and reconstituted in the Broadway mould, only to be rejected outright (quite rightly) by its too hasty buyer I saw plays about French in Detroit, pre-paid death in Los Angeles, blacks in Harlem and Puerto Ricans in the Bronx I learnt a lot about the American theatre and its ambitions in that fortnight and thought our actors well out of that kind of pressure And I learnt a lot about America too

Our conference began on the American model and year by year is assuming its own identity That as yet there has been little innovation has to a large degree reflected the conventional patterns of thinking of those involved And that includes myself. That it is not a more daring place, a breeding ground of revolution, that no idea yet has emerged to startle the world is a reflection of the caution of the profession itself, (look at Actors' Equity), not of the concept of the conference And I suspect that we play readers have been looking not for revolution but for old ideas in a new disguise

Accusations of monotony in the writing or our better known playwrights are beginning to be heard not infrequently And this is not without cause There is a danger, too, that some of these writers are beginning to move out of range of their audiences The Playwrights' Conference is a crucible for the senior writer as well as the tyro and he should use it as such, without self consciousness Two of the most rewarding conferences so far have been those in which Alan Seymour and Dorothy Hewett worked in harness with beginners on new scripts

The conference, simply by its existence, gives status to the young writer It is his market place to come and be seen and perhaps find himself a director or an agent, to meet his betters and put his point of view For directors and actors it is an annual reminder of their duty to new talent and to innovation It is a grain of sand in the skin of the profession which may yet have produced no pearl give it time In the meantime it remains as a reminder that pearls do begin as an irritation

What is the alternative? To quote Steve J Spears from the National Times November 29 'Belligerent would be the word These companies that say they have a play reading service you send them a play and wait, and wait - six weeks eight weeks, nothing happens I used to write filthy letters to them, which doesn't help ' The conference is nowhere near as valuable as it could be and it has no natural right to subvention But it is there to provide a service, if even to stop belligerent writers sending filthy letters It will be as innovatory as those who work in the theatre want it to be.

Katherine Brisbane is chairman of the Australian National Playwrights' Conference

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

CITY SUGAR

Jack Hibberd

Liddy Clark, Marilyn Vernon and Gary Files *Photo: David Parker*

CITY SUGAR by Stephen Poliakoff St Martins Theatre Opened 9 xi 76 | Director Ian Giles Designer Peter Corrigan
Leonard Brazil GARY FILES Rex GARY DOWN Big John JOHN WOOD Nicola Davies LIDDY CLARK Susan CATHERINE WILKIN Jane MARILYN VERNON

Apart from the Osmond Brothers, Stevie Wonder and Jamie Redfern, it has always seemed to me that our epoch was not one rich in precocity. Mass civilization might well entail retarded and lumpish development. The days when a benapkined Mozart could enchant an Empress with his own compositions on the violin or clavier, when a pubescent Rimbaud could alter the course of poetry, or some Polish toddler emerge from the Tatra Mountains and set alight the Paganini, seem quite remote.

Though not quite in the same league as these prodigies, England (via Russia) has tossed a youthful and prolific playwright in Stephen Poliakoff — at the age of twenty-three he has written numerous plays, eight of which have already been awarded professional productions.

His *City Sugar*, described by some dimwit as 'the most exciting and auspicious Wend End debut for a generation', is undeniably impressive given that most dramatists don't kick off till their late twenties, though they then frequently go on to last the full four quarters — e.g. Euripides, so vividly recounted in F.X. Leatherhead's *Lemon-Time and the Classic Greeks*.

City Sugar deals with the strident and artificial ethos of the DJ, where the medium is the message and the mouth the meaning, where the way you read the news is more important than its import, where Bangladesh and Janis Joplin's latest hangover achieve equal status in a hectic trivial patter.

It is a world of heroes and heroines, where reputations are made and decimated overnight. It is also a world of lies, where the media image is at utter odds with personal reality. The dupes in this aural jungle, so the play suggests, are both the purveyors and the listeners — numb dehumanized kids, desperate for sublimatory thrills.

City Sugar captures a lot of the work detail and atmosphere of platterdom. Indeed the play is overcrowded with the necessarily obsessive labours of the central character — DJ par excellence, Leonard Brazil. This is especially true of the first act which never moves much past expository establishment, something that could've been dramatically attained in half the time.

Certainly we learn of Brazil's disenchantment and cynicism, his awareness of the spurious and exploitative nature of his activities. The real personal and social sources of this disaffection nevertheless remain incompletely explored or substantiated. One major source for his jaundice seems to be a belief that the pop music of the sixties was incomparably better than that of the seventies — a feeble rationalization since surely the DJs were as noisome then as they are now. The drama of the first half is only precariously sustained by Brazil's conflicts with the sound engineer (Rex) who greedily and inanely aspires to stardom before the microphone.

The play chops scenically between the radio studio and two working class girls (Nicola and Susan) who are seen either at home or working soullessly as a supermarket. These two girls are the victims and gulls, victims of a stultifying commodity culture as much as anything else. In the second half, Nicola, an abject believer in pop hagiography and the hip demogogue, reaches the final round of an effigy competition with her ardent construction of a stuffed dummy representing a cult idiot called Ross. The dummy, significantly enough, is partly stuffed with commodities from the supermarket.

As *City Sugar* progresses we see the other side of Brazil, his fatal attraction to the power of his situation, the relish with which he manipulates both Rex and Nicola. Though bitter and full of self-disgust, Brazil goes on and up. He accepts the lure of a big DJ job in London, a leap from provincial Leicester, in a perfect example of moral cowardice or 'bad faith' as Sartre denoted it.

Nicola, who loses the ragged competition, has the scales removed from her eyes — her hero is a nasty little punk, her Big Bopper a drongo, her Wolf Man a bleating lamb. She takes it out on the goods at the supermarket.

This is all potentially powerful stuff. Unfortunately the play concertinas too much up at the end so that it all becomes a little glib, skeletal, even tagged on. The production with its lack of cuts early and its blurred even focus (failing to pluck out emphases and develop them) does not assist. Furthermore, an interesting indigenous notion would have been to set the play in Australia, 3SR Shepparton, for example, with the nirvana of Melbourne down the highway.

The evening however was particularly enlivened by a number of good performances, chiefly those of Gary Files as Brazil and Liddy Clark as Nicola.

Files, on and off mike, sounded demented and various, discordantly ringing all the vocal changes indicated in the text, though he might physically and facially push these almost psychotic contrasts and spirals even more. Liddy Clark, in a deliberately underwritten and dumb part, gathered together as much dignity and pathos as possible in her performance.

The design by Peter Corrigan was at once functional and symbolic, nattily deploying a revolve in the shape of a warped record, a kind of mandala with the studio console and Brazil narcissistically mirrored on the back wall, occupying its central aperture, with the girls' scenes taking place under the canopy of the warp. All very fluid and expressive visually of the victimizations. Trannies were slung along the side of the auditorium and gave the young audience, decked to the last in leathers and denim, a nice dose of the environmental.

In the sound department, the production is a tour de force - a veritable avalanche of complex sound cues. As the chops (in this case) on the bench rarely get a mention, I'd like to draw specific attention to the work of Arturo Hynes who remorselessly tickled three Revox instruments with all the precision and aplomb of a virtuoso.

LA MAMA

CASCANDO

THEATRE PROJECTS

FINGER ON THE TRIGGER

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP

THE YOUNG PEER GYNT

John Smythe

CASCANDO collaged and directed by Benny the Dip
Cascando: DANNY ROBINSON Waburn: NER GREENAWAY Anadun: VAL KIRWAN Florida: RACHEL HOWELLS Tinle: HOWARD STANLEY

FINGER ON THE TRIGGER by Mama Theatre Director James McCaughey
Devised and acted by BARBARA CIBEWSKA RACHEL FENSHAM SUSIE FRASER KAREN ROWELLS JANE REFSHAUGE

THE YOUNG PEER GYNT by Henrik Ibsen
SUE INGLETON ROB MELDRUM ROZ DE WINTER
assisted by JENNY KEMP

Three recent events in Melbourne set out to explore dimensions of life experience and modes of theatrical expression not normally reflected or floated in the mainstream of this city's dramatic activity. Two I found extremely stimulating and rewarding. The third was "really like you know it blew the minds of a lot of people" according to one involved actor but I must confess to being one of the fifty or so percent who found himself untouched.

Valerie Kirwan (aliases Benny the Dip and Chrloon) "works in textures of sound and movement to create a theatre that is part dream, part vision, part dance, part form". Her latest piece, *Cascando*, is described as "a collage of Samuel Beckett and other writings

Rob Meldrum and Sue Ingleton in Peer Gynt *Photo A.P.G.*

It depicts the frailty and ambiguity of human relations. All the actions of the four players are the result of their imprisonment within the boundaries of opposites.

For me at least, any perceptions or revelations concerning the human condition which may have been there in theory were imprisoned in practice by an apparent compulsion to render all verbal and visual clues as incoherent and obscure as possible. The odd amusing or imaginative image (like the burning and scraping of toast or the half dozen rain-hatted or brolly bearing extras wandering back and forth beyond the glass doors) did little to dispel my feeling that Kirwan and co. lacked either the craft or the will to share their esoteric experience with their audience. Or if in fact there was nothing more or less to the thing than what one saw or heard, I suppose I resented having to endure an trust what finally emerged (to me) as an inane and futile exercise. Kirwan, in the defence I invited her to give us (it follows this piece) seems to demand that her audience limit itself to instinctive response. I like to be freer than that and openly admit that my enjoyment of theatre is directly related to the degree to which all my faculties as a feeling, sensing, intuitive and thinking individual are stimulated.

By contrast, the APG based *Peer Gynt* group (not so much an arm as a few probing fingers of the APG, since they are still somewhat out on a limb) and the Theatre Projects *Finger On The Trigger* company show a hugely generous capacity to share.

Finger On The Trigger (or *Walls* or *Encores If Desired*) is a sometimes extremely personal evocation of what it is to be a woman an often alone individual, a person — which also embraces the values of collective awareness and response. It is an honest gentle bitter-sweet celebration of being. Aggressive political rigidity and coarse broad performance devices are carefully avoided so that important truths are not obscured and the audience is free to absorb, relate, learn, assess and reassess in the light of their own personal experience.

Although the material was largely developed and written by the actors, external sources have provided elements of text: four poems by Emily Dickinson, Chekov's *Three Sisters* and Shakespear's *King Lear* (or rather, Three Daughters) among others. But they have been thoroughly absorbed and re-emerge as part of their personal statement. On opening night some aspects of abstract physicalisation (emanating, I suspect, from director James McCaughey) had not been so readily digested but doubtless that will be solved as the process continues. They hope to extend the current season if another suitable venue can be found and may develop the project further next year.

And so to *Peer Gynt* and a theatrical experience I would rate as the most important and exciting I've been witness to for a long time.

Henrik Ibsen's 1867 dramatic poem is a classic in every sense of the word. Over a century old, it grew from the stories told of a real Peer Gynt who had lived half a century earlier and whose exploits had become legendary in the folk lore of the Gudbrandsdal peasants (whence he hailed) then celebrated in Asjornsen's *Norwegian Fairy Tales*.

In Ibsen's eyes he is no worthy hero but more a romantic fantasy dominated adolescent trying to work himself out and making a botch of it: the quintessential cop-out artist: incapable of facing the realities of life and finally death head-on. So in the end neither heaven nor hell

will have him and all he is good for is melting down and recasting via the button moulder's ladle. Or if spiritual reincarnation's more your bag, he's an imperfect soul that needs to go back and try again.

At the point Ibsen leaves him he is saved from all that, however, by the extraordinarily pure and ever faithful Solveig. Decades before the denouement she was seen to renounce her past claustrophobic life and commit herself totally and irrevocably to a future with Him. Peer couldn't quite handle all that just then, given an unresolved sense of guilt and comparative worthlessness added to his basic fear of commitment, responsibility and precious dreams being shattered by truth – so he took off around the world alone to find himself. But the quest continued to be sabotaged largely by impossible dreams and he returns none the wiser – to be told by Solveig that his real complete and whole self has always existed in her faith, hope and love. His face lights up and he cries out, "My mother – my wife! Oh purest of woman – hide me oh hide me, within your love". And she does!

It would be pointless to waste space accusing Ibsen of perpetuating malebred myths. He has simply exposed a lasting truth about human behaviour. Solveig's action echoes the ringing of church bells (in act two) to save Peer Gynt from trolls and Boygs, thus effectively diverting him from imminent confrontation with his fallibility, relative insignificance and mortality. (In a sense he suffers the curse of the beautiful vivacious young woman or spunky successful young man). Nowadays the roles may not be so readily defined by sex but the practice of "loving" protection persists. It is at the root of countless social political and religious philosophies let alone personal relationships.

Whilst on that point, it is interesting to note that the three APG members who set out earlier this year to "find themselves" as actors have largely succeeded in their quest without much "loving protection" from the parental group. The APG simply has not had the financial resources to support all its active offspring and the preoccupations and intentions of this particular project group were them comparatively limited favour from the Collective. But they refused to compromise and persisted, progressing beyond their self-absorbed (adolescent?) *Stasis* stage through their dynamically charismatic *Sylvia Plath* performance, to this more mature profound perceptive, confident, controlled, contained yet open-ended living and truly liberated *Peer Gynt*.

Ros de Winter, Rob Meldrum and Sue Ingleton have, with the assistance of Jenny Kemp, developed a remarkable evocation of acts one to three of Ibsen's epic and called it *The Young Peer Gynt*. It covers his adolescent phase from which, despite age he never really progresses. The dramatic focus is on his relationships with woman: his ever loving and protective mother whom he drives to despair with his lies; Solveig whom he idealises and idolises but never really relates to; Ingrid, the bride whom he abducts, seduces and abandons, the Dovre king's daughter whom he lusts after and attempts to use as a means to gaining a kingdom, two randy farm girls whom he counts himself man/troll enough to satisfy then later judges as crazy.

The approach of this tight knit performing group is the total antithesis of Gynt's, of course. They abhor the troll dictum, 'to thy self be enough' and reject the Boyg's injunction to 'go round about'. Their search for essential truth in performance is unweaving and committed, avoiding the side-track pitfalls of procrastination or exclusive preoccupation with technical skills, laugh-getting, money making etc to the extent that they become ends in themselves. The quest has been and will continue to be "long hard and worrying" but at the same time immensely stimulating, not only to themselves but to all who witness and share in the products of their endeavours.

Their work method has evolved from their involvement in the celebrated Rowena Balos voice classes and is based on the premise that the actor's whole body is the instrument or tool he / she uses. They have "put their voices back into their bodies" and fused the essence of performance with the essence of Ibsen's poetic text – distilling their own English language version from the translations of Archer and Fjelde and reference to the original Norwegian.

The focus is first and foremost on the text, discovering and liberating essential meaning by following clues and images right into their literal truth (a paraphrase of programme notes). Hence their decision, in dividing twenty-odd roles among three, to share Peer, Aase, Solveig and others between them in no way detracts from their objective. In fact it enhances the exposition of universal truths – although it must be said they are more successful in this than others have been (eg the APG cast of Brecht's *The Mother* last year) due to an extraordinary balance and cohesion in talent, skills, method and purpose.

Uncluttered simplicity is also the key to their use of space and objects. Three wooden spools (for underground cables) – one massive, the others successively smaller – are astutely utilised to great effect within the white canopied length of an average-to-small church hall. Mostly where needed to avoid confusion and sometimes to enhance a poetic image, simple suggestive costume and prop devices are used: a brown waistcoat for Peer, a white knotted headband for Solveig, a crocheted shawl (mostly tied round the waist) for Aase; a length of white lace dangling from the centre hole in one of the spools to suggest the recalcitrant bride, a cardboard cylinder to represent the "ugly boy". Lighting too is simple and direct. Live percussion interludes accompany scene transitions. But nothing is overdone or allowed to interfere with the central focus.

On the night I saw it there were a few imperfections, of course: the antics of the Dovre king's daughter distracted us from absorbing the full import of "to thyself be enough" and some problems associated with manifesting the Boyg and brid cries remained unresolved. But the important thing to record at this point is that within a matter of months this group has developed wonderfully yet they are anything but complacent. They are extremely receptive to outside comment and keenly critical of themselves. And they are avoiding the risk of getting into a performance rut by redistributing roles and portions of roles as the season progresses.

The Young Peer Gynt is the sort of show all Australia – indeed the world – should see. To my mind it is much more worthy of wide exposure than what we saw of Kemp's *Flowers* or Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance. And this group's basic work method should ensure that their show would not become stale or compromised for profit given a well managed tour.

Valerie Kirwan & Howard Stanley in Cascando

VALERIE KIRWAN REPLIES

Cascando has no story line so many interpretations in that sense can be made on it. A story line is a superficial and conventional device that man imposes on himself. It often includes other irrelevant parts of psychological and visual reality that a playwright may not want to include. A story line builds a play on the fact that our lives are habitual and automatic that we are tied to a fixed way of existing. It can limit exploration into the essence and understanding of truth. But *Cascando* offers an alternative to this device for in this play every action, every sound and every image exists for its own sake. A man peering through a window or sitting in a chair is not merely a logical reality. The deliberate disintegration of logical sequence throughout the play gives one the option to question the logical meaning we impose upon existence itself. The aim of the play is to heighten daily reality and reveal that direct experience can be more powerful than logic.

In *Cascando* one hears overlapping speeches which depict a universal babble. The logical significance of these speeches is drowned out. It is the mere rhythm and the seemingly contradicting linking of actions to these speeches that impart their emotional essence. For instance when a character takes off her wig and says "Listen" or blows upon a toaster and says "Detroit" the barriers of language are broken. Communication is direct and the gut knows more than the intellect. Then the endless impotent babble of humanity becomes music to our ears.

To conceptualize on the play during performance could lead to alienation. It is necessary for the audience to live with it moment by moment. In this way direct experience is achieved and no more need be said.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP

A STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION

THE DUDDERS

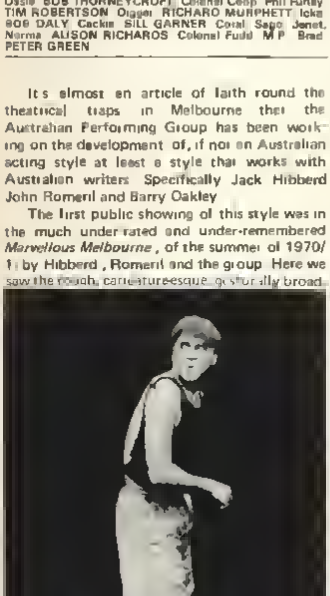
Garrie Hutchinson

A STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION by Jack Hibberd Pram Factory Director Paul Hampton
Monk O Neil MAX GILLIES

THE DUDDERS by John Romeril and John Timlin Pram Factory Director John Romeril. Choreographer Bob Thornycroft
Delma Lady Fitz Rabul SUSY POTTER Homer M P Oasis BOB THORNEYCROFT Colonel Coop Paul Furley TIM ROBERTSON Digger RICHARD MURPHETT Icka BOB DALY Cackie BILL GARNER Coral Sago Janet, Norma ALISON RICHAROS Colonel Fuzzl M P Brad PETER GREEN

It s almost an article of faith round the theatrical traps in Melbourne that the Australian Performing Group has been working on the development of, if not an Australian acting style at least a style that works with Australian writers Specifically Jack Hibberd John Romeril and Barry Oakley

The first public showing of this style was in the much underrated and under-remembered *Marvellous Melbourne* , of the summer of 1970/71 by Hibberd , Romeril and the group Here we saw the rough, caricatureesque, grotesquely broad vocally limited, physical, intimate, sweaty, closeup, familiar, improvisatory, friendly, larrikin, type of thing for the first time Well *Marvelous Melbourne* was much more of a statement of that then productions of La Mama or in the streets in the years previous had been (*O'Malley* in a similar vein came to Melbourne later in the year It increasingly seems like an aberration in style given the way things have gone in Sydney and Melbourne since)



Max Gillies as Monk O Neil *Photo A.P.G*

Whether or not larrikin acting is a genuine style of acting is a moot point, but certainly it is a thread that has continued to the present and is dragged out whenever an audience needs to be entertained. Closer to the truth probably is that the A P G style is a combination of directors and design ideas that weld with a naturally occurring kind of closeup feeling for expressing a text physically without too much emotional (character) bullshit The spaces the A P G work in place tremendous limitations on what you can get away with Intimacy breeds honesty in actors

The accepted directorial and design ideas — poor, rough, use of tableaux, anti illusionist, transformations, doubling, emblematic dressing and other adjectives also derive from the necessities of the space and the writers. The whole thing is built on the idea that the texts and the actors will have enough vitality and honest sweaty entertainment value to make just about anything work Most of the time it does, however inappropriate the style might be There's nothing like a bad breathed actor speaking into your face and staring you in the eye to keep you awake

But saying that doesn t mean that everything is rosy, and that this kind of acting has been honed down and developed into coherence. Ad hoc-ery still prevails But interesting attempts are being made in different directions

Aside from the nostalgic and determinedly popular attempts of *Melba, The Hills Family Show,* and now the *Soapbox Circus,* there has been the work of Lindsay Smith, for example, to democratise acting He has used people who previously had not been actors in productions like Brecht s *The Mother,* Romeril's *Golden Holden,* and Hare's *Fanshen.*

Here actors are not so much actors as committed individuals by their sincerity, believability, and honesty a performance is illuminated. Although using other peoples words, this idea is similar to a lot of work of say, the Women's Theatre Group It is who you are and what you are saying that is important, not the theatrical effect An audience knows that the people on the acting area are what they appear to be They are not really playing someone else They adopt roles for a purpose, and will often break out of them to address an audience from their own experience This is not so much acting as being on stage Sometimes in the productions mentioned above, it works Sometimes it doesn't

Another direction is indicated by Max Gillies In his current performance as Monk O'Neil in Jack Hibberd's *A Stretch of the Imagination* This is a very refined physical style that incorporates the gamut of comic techniques Gillies does some amazing prat falls, face pulls, bum wiggles, eye rolls, bits of mime, shrugs grimaces His Monk is a kind of lantern jawed Australian subject to fits of the Jewish comedian Gillies is more actor oriented than interested in developing a character-based, internally coherent, naturalistic personage

Gillies over the years has given an amazing range of caricatures and comic performances from Menzies and Santamaria to the multitudes in *Melba* to Chekov's non smoker He is one of the A P G s assets And this Monk is genuinely entertaining, no doubt about that Perhaps his vocal style might be elasticised but that is a problem with most actors, the finding of a flexible Australian voice And the final black, drunken, deathwish speech is performed depressingly well

The thing about Gillies though is that he is an actor with an arsenal of skills developed over a long period that appears to me to be underused—too often the parts don t seem to extend his range Even this Monk is a demonstration, albeit a very good one, rather than a challenge It is almost imposed on top of the text, not coming from inside It That is really a comment on the confidence and flair he shows But maybe some Restoration comedy might not go astray

If Gillies is the skilled physical comic, then the Rowena Balos faction Roz de Winter Robert Meldrum and Sue Ingleton are well into clear speech Currently they are performing the first three acts of *Peer Gynt* Using a collection of cable drums, a couple of lights and some strong vocal and physical images they have made a very moving version of the play Their Peer Gynt is a collection of aspects of the character and his relationships and they swap the role of Peer Gynt between them There is no doubt that the whole thing is better articulated, and more understandable for that, and more refined than the average A P G show There is no sign of roughness they are poor but holy The images are directly related to the text in a more or lass symbolist way The physicality is not of the caricature type nor of the comic type but an appropriate stance That is to say, it is the minimum necessary to be in keeping with the words, not an embroidery on top of them It almost never distracts from what they regard as essential which is Ibsen s speech

This is a new development for A P G members, who have previously (to my knowledge), not come under the spell of a teacher It will be interesting to see whether any of this filters back to the main group

The last of the current productions is *The Dudders* by Romeril and John Timlin This is ostensibly a theatre restaurant piece about American / Australian relations during the second world war What it really is, is a play about depression and imperialism masquerading as cheerfulness and smart Aussie conmen Here mixed in with an incomprehensible narrative, and some inspired jitterbugging is a mystified trad style A P G show where drunken lunacy and images seep through It doesn t matter to the bibulous theatre-goer, but it does represent a missed chance But why a theatre restaurant show?

From all this history it might be possible with hindsight to wish that the A P G had picked a style, gone for it properly and come out with sequences of polished product That hasn't happened But what has happened is that here has been a diversity of work done, failure mixed with success, ambition mixed with anything handy at the time

But it is a measure of the importance of the ideas floating around the A P G that praise when given is extravagent, and criticism when preaches the nadir when it is not Todays comment is that looking at *The Dudders* is a depressing reminder of how little things have changed since *Marvellous Melbourne.* Same style, but the optimism has now gone

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY

AND THE BIG MEN FLY

Don Batchelor

Steve Kenyon and Douglas Hedge *Photo: Q.T.C.*

AND THE BIG MEN FLY by Alan Hopgood S G I O Theatre (opened 24 xi 76) Director Murray Foy Designer James Ridewood
J J Forbes DOUGLAS HEDGE Wally LEO WOCKNER Achilles Jones STEVE KENYON Lil KAY McFEETER Harry Head RAY MEAGHER Wobbly Coates JOHN HEYWOOD T V Hostess RIKKI McDONALD Floor Man MARK HEMBROW Les Williams MARK HEMBROW

It's end of the 1976 season time for the Queensland Theatre Company, and this year's grand final was *And the Big Men Fly*. Not destined for the history books, this one

From opening bounce to final hooter the home team never really came together There were too many handling errors, small things that take the edge off a game (or a show), and their cumulative effect put the over all result into reserve grade standard

Apart from one vintage mark by Ray Meagher as Harry Head the footy commentator who soared mightily in an ecstatic description of Achilles Jones first goal the big men never really got off the ground and nor did the little women

Alan Hopgood's yarn is a tricky piece of theatre An M C G full of school teachers round Australia has fallen into the trap of thinking that it is only a tall-story about a superathelete on both of which counts it is bound to be a hit with the boys in the class The very mention of football It is believed will rivet the preponderance of Aussie male attention That may be valid, but, even this group has its standards, and can turn very nasty when the pace is less than sparkling The same merciless derision can be heaped on a good tall-story when it is poorly handled in the telling So teachers and theatre companies take on awesome risks with this play In its apparent simplicity there lurk a prodigious number of pitfalls

Not to mention the heart of the play which is about the charm of innocence a quality that doesn't readily commend itself to the average Aussie adolescent not one that is easily captured even by an experienced and expert actor

In casting the key role of Achilles Jones, Murrary Foy took a gamble It is the sort of gamble that occasionally (not too often, thank God!!) produces a Paul Hogan The part calls for a performance of extraordinary subtlety to produce an effect of economy, directness, and size Achilles is the artless boy from the backwoods who blasts his way bare footed, in one unlikely season into the sagas of football He becomes one with the heroes of the Golden Age

In attempting this Herculean role, Steve Kenyon looked every centimetre the golden boy wonder but despite obvious coaching from the side lines, and some evident application to the task he never became air-borne Mentally, and often literally, he was on the back foot. The child-like quality, that enviable freedom of the spirit, eluded him He presented a nice enough country lad bewildered by city sophistication He was never the towering figure in a tall story the stuff of legend

There were attempts by members of the cast to capture the necessary measure of exaggeration Douglas Hedge went after the grotesque element In his portrayal of J.J Forbes, but instead of the few broad deft strokes with which a cartoonist catches the essentials of character and the amusing distortions, Hedge cluttered the performance with a lot of fussy foot work and other flourishes so that the manager big-shot, aspiring politician got lost In the whirl wind

It was a pity also that he and Leo Walker (Wally) didn't make more of the Abbott and Costello possibilities suggested by their physical make up As it was, Wockner lumbered through the situation appropriately enough but it was somehow a separate performance from Hedge's

Since the Lil character is so centered on Achilles Jones and works off him, Kay McFeeter did not get the support she needed to do anything special Still, she might have held more true to her bumpkin beginnings instead of transforming herself into something of a girl about town by the end of the play We know Hopgood sees Lil as a willy materialist and something of the heel in Achille's life, but cartoon characters don't change Through all experience they remain true to their nature

Ray Meagher, as Harry Head the commentator, was the only flier on the night, and, if he hadn't been so badly let down by the crowd noises, which either didn't work at all or were distant, or were wrong in mood, he might have given the whole show a lift It was too realistic a performance much of the time to be in style, but in its moments of ecstatic apoplexy it was a triumph John Heywood got the physical aspects of Wobbly Coates pretty right, and was visually funny in a couple of freezes he did at climatic moments in crucial games, but, overlay it though he might with Ocker sounds that light weight voice lacked the confident tones of a pedantic know-all

The big fault of the the production was the pace A yarn like this simply can't be sustained if you give people even a moment to think It is all so slight that unless it is continually moving it loses most of its ability to hold attention There were pauses between scenes, or lighting fades, sufficient in length and number to slow the momentum and to lose pace at all is to lose grip on the play as a tall-story

Another disappointment in the production was the complete absence of any attempt at the special effects called for in the text at the time of the great shoot up with the Williamses Where were the breaking windows, the flying tins the shattering bowls of plastic fruit? These would have given life to an otherwise flat scene

The set, too, contributed to the general diffusion Successful though it was in a representational way, specially in the corrugated iron section of Achilles shack at Menangatang, and in the T V set for World of Sport, it opened up too much space overhead then filled it with clutter all of which worked against the economy of statement Why be representational at all? Why not make suggestions, the same kind of bold essential strokes as seem proper to the characters and the tale

For all this carping, applause during and after the show would indicate that plenty of fans had an entertaining evening, and would not agree with me or the two people in my vicinity who did not return after the second interval But it's Barassi to a brick that the crowd at the M C G had a more exciting grand final to 1976 than we did

BRISBANE REPERTORY THEATRE

HOW COULD YOU BELIEVE ME....?

Richard Fotheringham

Marina Bossou (Beatrice) and Graeme Hattrick (Brighella) *Photo Brisbane Rep*

HOW COULD YOU BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAID I'D BE YOUR VALET WHEN YOU KNOW I'VE BEEN A LIAR ALL MY LIFE? adapted from Goldoni by John Bell Director Graeme Johnston Designer David Bell
Pantalone GORDON SAUNDERS Clarice RHEE HOLTYER Lombardi LEWIS NORMAN Silvio PHIL ARMIT Beatrice MARINA BOSSOU Florindo PETER GAHAN Truffaldino SEAN MEE Smeraldina MONICA GILEEDDER Brighella GRAEME HATTRICK Porter DICK EREELAND Pasquitos NICOLE LECOMPTE JACKIE TEUMA DAPHNE ANDERSON CHRISTINE McGRATH JUDY FOSTER

Repertoty Theatre has just announced its repertoire of plays for the first 6 months of 1977, and a varied and adventutous programme it is Plays by three Queensland playwrights, Edward Bond's *The Sea, Bullshot Crummond* Seneca's *Oedipus*, *Grease*, an original documentary on war, and *Kennedy's Children* Add to this the one act and less commercial plays which they slot in Mondays to Wednesdays and the Early Childhood Drama project, and you've got to admit the place is alive and bubbling

Whether 1977 will be good for the box office remains to be seen Rep has of late swung towards the lightweight with a cheap and bawdy *Lysistrata* and the present romp *How Could You Believe Me* – etc Both have summoned forth in large numbers the lounge suited and long dressed couples from darkest Hamilton and Indooroopilly, and they're the critical sector that decide the hits from the misses Being of course the universal man I can appreciate both Seneca and an inflating glowing plastic penis, Edward Bond and Waiter there's soup in my fly The notion of a consistent house style is an odious marketing concept but it works and Rep like other companies who flaunt it has found audiences voting with their feet The saving grace is that in their 200 seat theatre in the round 60 is a satisfactory audience for the actors if not for the accountants.

In 1972 John Bell and a group of actors from the Old Tote took Carlo Goldoni's slight Eighteenth century commedia dell' arte script *The Servant of Two Masters*, and sent it up gutless The stock lovers, masters and servants of the old comedy were reinterpreted as caricatures of modern equivalents - Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy Katherine Hepburn, Jimmy Durante and a host of others who have faded from my memory Lousy jokes and puns were fired out with disarming glee, and presiding overall was Robin Ramsay (still remembered then for falling off the *Bellbird* silo) as the fair a bloody dinkum Nino Culotta Italian servant of the title The resultant romp was backed with piano and drums, acrobatics and songs including that from which the title was pinched It was a huge success

The Repertory version has fewer songs, even fewer competent singers, taped music and a very inexperienced and uneven ameteur cast It's still funny enough to send us away mildly entertained, and I'm reluctant to enter into unfair comparisons. A few must however be made, because of the very different ways in which each production approached the script

My main criticism of the Sydney production was that they hadn't gone far enough Truffaldino (the servant of two masters) was still burdened with all the 'I'm so hungry' lines of the original play, and unlike the other characters seemed stuck in the Eighteenth century conception of the servant in spite of his Ocker Italian accent The further the cast got from the Goldoni original the funnier it was The joy in their madness sprang from the freedom and quick wittedness which blossomed as they tossed aside formal characterization and good taste Some of the jokes and caricatures were decidedly in, particularly for a Brisbanite watching Sydney actors playing to Sydney audiences, but what the hell it was still funny

In Brisbane the words that the Sydney actors made up and threw away with abandon became the tyranny of a formal script The director Graeme Johnston has at the best of times a tendency to treat his actors as puppets and to drill them in the old fashioned walk, turn and speak tradition This may have some value as part of actor training, but it kills stone dead any comic spontaneity

In using the Sydney script with very few concessions to the Brisbane locale, the production loses layer after layer of comedy Jokes about *Bellbird* and N I D A were only sharp and funny when spoken by Robin Ramsay in the Parade Theatre, it's specific, 'in' humor In some cases jokes which had meaning only when related to a particular piece of business (such as Truffaldino's comments about Headmasters after both his masters have spanked him with a wooden paddle) were retained even though quite different business was used (in Brisbane the masters kicked him around the floor)

The programme notes are partly pinched from the back cover of a Penguin edition of Goldoni's plays, and talk about how Goldoni changed the old "comedy of intrigue" into a "natural comedy of character" You only have to go to the introductory essay of the same volume to find that *Servant of Two Masters* (one of Goldoni's first efforts) belongs to the former genre, even if it had been otherwise in the original by the time the Sydney actors had dismembered it the script didn't have a natural character within cooee Yet in Brisbane the lovers in particular were played in romantic comedy style, and nearly all the characters were strangely subdued. Only Monica Gilfedder as Smeraldina complete with fruit and prawn hat got somewhere near the degree of extravagant inanity which could have made the evening start to bounce and bubble

Sean Mee was an engaging and friendly Truffaldino but he got little help from the production The opening was a perfect example of this it commenced well enough with the cast appearing at the entrance to the auditorium and Truffaldino inviting us all to have a bloody good a time eh? And the cast cracked jokes and fooled around as we shuffled in But then we were met by three Marylin Monroes in short white knicker-winking dresses who simpered "tickets please" and scuff step tap danced their way ahead of us to out seats And as if that wasn't enough, once we were seated the stage cleared the lights went out, the cast came on in the dark, and the play proper including Truffaldino's speeches to the audience began with us in the dark distance and the actors in the kind of pool lighting more appropriate to a realistic drama It turned something as simple as talking directly and casually to the audience into an awkward violation of the fourth wall convention

And yet it worked well enough to attract full houses, and having stooped to the odious I ought to redress the balance by pointing out that there was an original and funny swordlight a dining room scene which worked better as slapstick than the precision farce the Old Tote tried to turn it into, and that I actually preferred some of the corniest moments played with general youthful enthusiasm rather than professional comic timing I'm a sucker for a gag Waiter there's a Soup in my I liked that

CANBERRA REPERTORY COMPANY

CABARET

NIMROD

DIRTY LINEN

Roger Pulvers

CABARET Book by Joe Masteroff Based on the play by John Van Druten and stories by Christopher Isherwood Theatre 3 (opened 25 xi 76) Director Rae McGregor Designer Russell Brown
Principals Master of Ceremonies IAN HOWARD Clifford Bradshaw DAMIEN CONNOR Sally Bowles SALLIE SALLIS Max JOHN THORP

DIRTY LINEN by Tom Stoppard Canberra Playhouse (opened 23 xi 76) Director Ken Horler
Maidens Detobed ELIZABETH MORTISON Cocklebury-Smythe M P JOHN GADEN McTeazle M P RALPH COTTERILL Chamberlain M P WILLIAM NAGLE Withenshaw M P Chairman ROBERT DAVIS Mrs Ebury M P JOHANNA PIGOTT French M P ALAN TORIN

When is professional theatre amateurish and amateurs professional? Two productions I have seen in succession – Ken Horler's *Dirty Linen* and Ross McGregor's *Cabaret* – prove that this distinction is not often valid. Moreover, a stack of Old Tote programmes in my drawer attest to a kind of glossy ineptitude of so much of their work. "Professional" productions may mean only that the actors are paid, having nothing to do with the quality of the product. Well now Canberra Rep has presented a show that is so polished and fine. If it's standards you want, they're very very high.

The script itself is a drag, however. Those endless shtits from the Kit Kat Klub to the pension, and those meat-stock Germans and plaintive Jewish strains! I mean, my mother could make as wicked a matzo ball as the next door neighbour's but when it sticks in the throat like this!

But the production was magnificent. Sallie Sallis played Sally Bowles. She was fantastic in both the cabaret and the intimate scenes. Ms Sallis is a professional night club singer. Not only that – she is the actor with the most star quality to appear in this city. If I were a scout for a commercial theatre she wouldn't last long in capital territories. She played Sally Bowles with the right rough quality, like a piece of wood that has been tossed around in the ocean and hasn't had time to smooth the edges. She leaves Liza Minelli for dead.

While on the subject of the music, there is Keith Helgesen. The arrangements were superb, and Helgesen's own conducting, in sequined wig and unmatching "Wherrett-socks", was a dramatic part of the show in itself.

Ross McGregor had filmmaker Henning Schou film a sequence in a train of Bradshaw the Christopher Isherwood figure in the story, and Ernst Ludwig, his fascist friend, meeting and arriving in Berlin. This film sequence in sepia tone was a brilliant idea: it set the time and place of the piece and lent to its authenticity. Paul Krieg, too must be mentioned. He played Herr Schultz poignantly, quietly. Too often these sad-eyed Jewish types are either Herr Schmaltz or Herr Schlimazel!

The costumes were good too, skillfully verging on and off the decadent. And there were some fine minor touches, as in the look and behaviour of the two look-alike love-alike beauties, played by Jenny Ongley and Wendy Tubman.

At the end there was a timed winding down of the action in grotesque effects.

When the question of professional standards is being debated as now, this production at Canberra Rep must take its place.

DIRTY LINEN

This production didn't move. For a farcelul of double entendres and lines dropped hotter than potatoes the play's direction was all too static. It turned out as a comedy of very low metabolism.

The backdrop was a flat of flesh headlines of super size. The opening was lively, with Ms Gotobed, a female clerk with Pieter Breugel the Elder bosoms, slipping into a silk slip. John Gaden and Ralph Cotterill M P s enter in good comic style, waiting for each other at the door like Falstaff and Ford. They come in and mix up their indentical bowler hats. In the beginning of the play the movement was back and forth across the front. The lines came off this movement.

But after a short while the characters sat down and barely moved. In fact, the entire second half of the play was spoken like this, sedentary and without lightness.

Perhaps director Ken Horler couldn't get away from his directing style in Bentley's *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?* There the direction was excellent. The fact that the actors sat most of the time, spread a heavy committee room oppression into the corners. Again we have a committee room and a lively female character to one side. But the nature of Stoppard's farce demands a brisker approach.

Take John Gaden's long monologue about boobs and being 'on the floor'. It was spoken peering into Ms Gotobed's cleavage the whole time, a ploy which worked during the first few seconds of the speech but turned to tedium as it went on.

Perhaps I am dwelling too long on these aspects of the production. But I found the execution of the play so totally lacking. Ms Gotobed's miserable cliche part is hard to act with any subtlety. What do you do when an MP comes in and reaches for your loins, or when your skirt is ripped off in midstream? The reaction is important if the message of being a sex object who comes out on top in the end is to be brought across. Again, the director's lack of panache was evident.

There was some good acting. This came especially from Robert Davis, John Gaden, and, that brilliant comic man, Ralph Cotterill. Robert Davis' animation in the second half and his wonderful facial expressions rescued more than a few jokes.

A play like *Dirty Linen* is purposefully frothy, mainly of the tiny little bubbles on top of the froth. Its characters, a dumb blonde on the way down, a handful of zany mountebanks of parliament need not be any more than the composite of their funny lines. The themes of sexism, hypocrisy in high places, and scandal-mongering journalism are part of it too. But this is no black comedy. In the end the M P s are found out, Ms Gotobed beds down the last member of the committee, and, as the final line announces, "the comedy is over". A play like this is all in the production. It is surface comedy that has moved from the drawing-room into parliament house. This Nimrod production, unlike John Bell's fantastic tours de farce, was murky and bogged. It never even reached the surface.

Sally Sallis, Gary Prichard and Damien Connor in Cabaret. *Photo: Canberra Rep.*

MARIAN STREET THEATRE

TARANTARA! TARANTARA!

Maria Prerauer

TARANTARA TARANTARA by Ian Taylor Marian Street (opened 9 xi 76) Director Ted Craig Designer David Brinson
Joe JOHN HANNAN Richard D Oyly Carte RICK BURCHALL Sir Arthur Sullivan RAYMOND DUPARC Jessie Bond JULIE CHENERY Sybil Gray ROSALIE HOWARD Geraldine Almar BARBARA FARRELL William Gilbert JOHN FAASSEN George Grossmith JON EWING Mr White PHILLIP SCOTT

Tarantara Tarantara, the light hearted, fast moving Gilbert and Sullivan show, bounced into Sydney's Marian Street, the boulevard theatre of Kiliara, for a run right through to a very merry Christmas

Ian Taylor's musical is a cleverly pieced together collage of excerpts from the stormy careers of the two squabbling gents W S Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan — backstage blowups and front of house triumphs that were once the talk of Victorian England — blended with enchantingly interpolated scenes from their most popular operettas The seven ubiquitous singing-actors and one very busy musical director, who pounds a piano perched on the prompt side with just the right mixture of correct style and joie de vivre, slip in and out of a hundred different roles at the drop of a wig or the swing of a cape And it's all done at a speed that at times seems faster than sound

Director Ted Craig of the Old Tote's *Equus* fame and designer David Brinson together exercise an illusionist's magic in scene switching and twiddling Nothing ever outstays its welcome and there's always a new fly past of events before there's a chance of getting bogged down in too much boring detail One second John Faassen, outstanding as the peppery sharp-tongued but brilliantly witty Gilbert, may be testily stomping into rehearsal hurling a well-earned insult at Sullivan, the next snatching up a coat from the on-stage clothes-tree for a quick change or launching into as nasty a Mikado as was never made in Japan, while giant pop-up fans unfold atmospherically from the floor behind him

Or Raymond Duparc may be suddenly transformed from an equally fine Sullivan — every inch a vain, pompous, gambling, whining social-climber puffed up with an exaggerated sense of his own musical importance — into the shreds and patches of minstrel Nanki-Poo or whatever

Jon Ewing, too, is quite dazzling in his astonishingly different portraits of eccentric johnnies, Rick Burchell makes a wickedly handsome entrepreneur O'Oyly (Ody) Carte, and John Hannan an endearingly cheeky stagehand While the three little maids in and out of school Julie Chenery, Rosalie Howard and Barbara Farrell are as pretty as a picture whether masquerading as the Queen knighting Sullivan — his gong came long before Gilbert's — playing other lady mentors or the G and S heroines Even musical director Phillip Scott remains in Victorian character, at the piano while tactfully still ensuring that everyone sings spot on and articulates the words with exceptional clarity

The show begins at a *Yeoman of the Guards* rehearsal rather late in the duo's career and then flashes back In revue-like sketches it manages to take a good look at the whole curiously English Gilbert and Sullivan cult — a phenomenon as incomprehensible to most foreigners as cucumber sandwiches eaten on wet grass and kippers for breakfast — without spoiling the fun by digging down too far psychologically It brings out the peculiarities of the on again, off-again collaboration with much good humor, revealing the self-made suffering of Sir Arthur who always imagined he was really destined for greater feats like composing grand operas but was pulled down by Gilbert (But he wasn't, as one glance at his *Ivanhoe* will prove He was a man of small talent) While it also shows Gilbert's bitterness at his allotted second-string-to-Sullivan part — "the monkey on his barrel-organ", as he expresses it, which becomes all the more poignant now that time, that most merciless of critics, has put everything into its right perspective It is actually the evergreen genius of Gilbert's satire that alone has kept Sullivan's rather wishy washy tunes alive

And perhaps the biggest irony of all is the fact that Sir Arthur, the Royals' darling goodie goodie, seems to have died early from an excess of the good life while Sir Gilbert the baddie met an accidental end from an overdose of chivalry, not to say heroism

But the script goes too far in claiming that every opera house in the world resounds to these operettas. Come, come, Ian Taylor There are hundreds of Continental theatres that have never mounted a Gilbert and Sullivan at all Such quirky humor is fully understood only by audiences with a strong English-speaking tradition Try searching programs in Germany, Austria, Italy France or Spain this year and see how many G and S you find

Not that such a flaw will in any way mar the enjoyment of *Tarantara Tarantara* at Marian Street It's great fun

Marie Prerauer is music critic and arts feature writer for *The Australian* and writes by kind permission of the Editor

John Faassen (Gilbert) and Raymond Duparc (Sullivan) *Photo Marian Street*

ENSEMBLE THEATRE

CALIFORNIA SUITE

Rex Cramphorn

CALIFORNIA SUITE by Neil Simon Ensemble Theatre Director Hayes Gordon Designer Brian Nickless Hannah Warren Diana Nichols Gert Franklin CAROL RAYE William Warren Sidney Nichols Stu Franklin STANLEY WALSH Marvin Michaels Mort Hellender ARTHUR SHERMAN Bunny, ANNA WEIR Millie Michaels Beth Hellender HELENE KAUB

Stanley Walsh and Carol Raye *Photo. Ensemble*

The four playlets (the word is from the programme) that make up *California Suite* are fine examples of Neil Simon's very funny dialogue. It's dialogue with a manic life of its own, the characters speak wisecracks like some sort of foreign language whose speed and vividness can only dazzle those not lucky enough to be born to speak it. The first playlet skilfully eases us into the convention of the dialogue by allowing us to identify with an ex-New Yorker who has lived so long in California that he has forgotten how to speak it, and can't, at first, keep up with his ex-wife who has stayed on in New York and, of course, speaks it nineteen to the dozen. And having suggested the New York origins of this remarkable language, Neil Simon moves on in the later playlets, to show his mastery of regional variants, even including one in which foreigners (an English actress and her husband) speak it.

The characters and situations from which the dialogue springs are fairly simple: a long-since divorced couple whose seventeen year-old daughter wants to stay with the father in California instead of with the mother in New York; the mother wants her back but comes to understand that to demand her return will further alienate her; a husband from Philadelphia who has woken up after a drunken evening to find a girl in his bed just as his wife arrives, an English actress and her bi-sexual, antique dealer husband whose 'understanding' is a little shaken when she gets drunk after failing to win an Academy Award, two couples from Chicago on holiday together whose friendship has been worn threadbare by over-exposure to one another. I have detailed all this to indicate the rather neat balance of serious/sentimental characters and situations with the more overtly comedy/slapstick ones. Neil Simon begins with the 'heaviest' (relatively speaking) material – the divorcee's splendid flow of quips conceals heartbreak; he moves to a marital crisis which could end in disaster but is saved by the wife's slightly ambiguous decision (is she being Jewish/funny or Jewish/brave when she decides to stay with him and spend all his money? A bit of both no doubt), he comes back after interval with a warm human understanding and concludes with rollicking slapstick.

These are all characters and situations that a television trained audience can recognize in a flash. I found myself thinking that these simplified 'psychological' insights are the common currency of today's popular entertainment. The director, Hayes Gordon, has made an interesting decision in underlining this aspect of the play in his production. He makes us listen, in blackout, to the sort of lushly orchestrated, popular, sentimental music that most perfectly associates itself with the sorts of insights that the plays offer – the most striking example, probably, was the *segue* into Barbara Streisand singing 'People – who need people –' after the playlet about the actress who needed to be made love to by her slightly reluctant husband. I also liked the opulent overture piece that faded down to muzak level as the set lights (the Beverly Hills Hotel) came up. There is a perverse glory about the whole-hearted emotional cliche – it's the life-blood of large sections of American musical and film after all. There's a kind of eerie resonance, which I greatly relish, about films like *Back Street*, with Susan Hayward and *Imitation of Life* with Lana Turner. And it's very much the kind of thing that the music for *California Suite* brought to mind.

Seven years ago I reviewed *Plaza Suite* for *The Bulletin*. That time it was Williamson's and featured Google Withers and Alfred Sandor. And in those days the shape was three plays with two intervals – which suggests to me that either Neil Simon is becoming increasingly economical, refining himself to a form which will ultimately coincide with the revue sketch, or else that he is taking into consideration a constantly shrinking span of audience concentration – a span which will ultimately coincide with the extent of the television commercial.

I said then that Google Withers 'looks a little stitched up and uncomfortable' and remarked on 'the slightly constrained and insecure air' of the cast. I had rather the same impression with Carol Raye and Helene Kaub, though less so with the male members of the quartet (Stanley Walsh and Arthur Sherman) at the Ensemble. It is possible that minor insecurities related to the early days of a run explain this impression, but it is also conceivable that actors find some difficulty in reconciling the characters they are playing with the dazzling flow of words. I can only say that when Neil Simon's dialogue seems to work best, in the filmed performances, it is with the actors like Anne Bancroft in *Prisoner of Second Avenue* and Walter Matthau in *The Sunshine Boys*, who seem to manifest a savage maniacal enthusiasm for the language itself, letting the easily-graspable character look after itself. At any rate that seems to me to be the way Neil Simon puts the emphasis. I very much enjoyed seeing Carol Raye again, thought Stanley Walsh gave her good support, and found the third playlet the most satisfactory, from a performance point of view.

NIMROD

A HANDFUL OF FRIENDS

Dorothy Hewett

A HANDFUL OF FRIENDS by David Williamson Nimrod Upstairs (opened 12 xi 76) Director John Bell Designer Larry Eastwood
Russell McAlister PETER CARROLL Wendy McAlister JUDITH FISHER Jill McAlister BERYS MARSH Mark Marshall PETER SUMNER Sally Marshall ANNA VOLSKA

Sitting in on David Williamson's new play at the Nimrod is a salutory and painful experience, like living at home and having dinner parties

We have all been there With the inevitable bullshit, infighting confessionals betrayals and partings of handfuls of our friends, relatives and colleagues, and every shot flies straight home

This is *A Handful of Friends'* fourth season after Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth, and it would be hard to fault John Bell's elegant production The Sydney style is smart, rapid, edged with wit and malice The problem of this style is that sometimes the essential seriousness of a play, the moral tragedy if you like, tends to be minimized This doesn't happen here In fact it is the brittle expertise of the production that discloses the worm in the bud, reveals the skull beneath the skin There is an uneasy balancing act going on which hits so beautifully the life of the protagonists, a balance between wit and bitter high seriousness As the play draws to a close, the tight control deliberately fragments, the pace slows, until we are left with scenes that emerge like sad, slow film clips falling inexorably into place This is a subtle difficult, demanding play for director, actors, designer and audience, but there is nothing else needed, as some reviewers have maintained there is, no overweighting, no heavy handed clarifications no sequels, no dinner party scene It is all there in a beautifully poised, spare, sophisticated script Any difficulty can only lie in the subtlety Australian audiences are not strong on subtlety neither are Australian drama reviewers.

"I'm going to make one good film before I die It's the only motive I've got left, and its going to be so good that none of those bitter little typewriter assassins will dare knock it," says Mark, the film producer in *A Handful of Friends'*

A great deal of modern Australian social history is packaged into this play academia the film industry, the media the libel laws, even the *Nation Review* gets a guernsey This is not unusual in a Williamson play In his last play *The Department*, we saw the slow and careful documentation of the characters the orchestration of their subtle relationships In this play the detail is sharper, more impressionistic we are into the nitty gritty in no time, and there is the added bonus of the theatrical risks I like to see David Williamson taking risks He understands so well the well made realist play that a certain amount of risk taking is now necessary and he doesn't shirk it

There is always a morality that informs the world of Williamson's plays, a morality his characters are uneasily aware of The difference in *A Handful of Friends* is that the moral choices are so close to the skin, the characters are very aware, as he is, and the razor's edge they walk on makes them both vulnerable and terrifying

The whole play can be seen as a metaphor about realism, its pitfalls and triumphs, its uneasy relationship with reality particularly in Australia where we all end up knowing too much about each other for comfort

It doesn't seem quite accidental that in the week *A Handful of Friends* opened in Sydney, the novelist Christina Stead living back in the western suburbs, went on record with an interview in *The National Times* maintaining that she does not write fiction Her characters are people she has known, speaking their words, behaving as they do

"It's a great mistake to think people don't like being in books they love it" she says

Anna Volska Peter Sumner and Berys Marsh *Photo Peter Holderness*

Anna Volska and Peter Sumner — *Photo: Peter Holderness*

"That's one thing about being a writer: people instantly tell you everything." (1)

In *A Handful of Friends* Russell, the academic, just returned from the States, is talking to sister Jill about their mutual old friend, Mark, the local movie-maker.

Russell: One thing about Mark, come fame or fortune, he never forgets his old friends.
Wendy: No. He puts them in his films.
Russell: Creative people do it all the time. I put Mark in the novel I tried to write didn't I? He was the central character. I'm rather flattered to think he found us interesting enough to want to include us.

Of course there is another side to the coin and Russell picks it up in his confrontation scene with Mark towards the end of the play, when he accuses: "You had no right to make fun of me and my novel no matter how bad it was; and to make fun of my drinking problem." It's a point taken up by Bob Ellis writing about *A Handful of Friends* in *Nation Review* as if it was a kind of incest. (Jill writes her backstabbing revenge piece on Mark and his actress wife Sally for *Nation Review*) and Ellis is as ambiguously funny/unfunny as the play:

"I worry about writers. So many of them used to wet their beds at boarding schools and now they beat their wives: some of them like David Williamson by proxy on the public stage. What gets me down is the feeling I have that the craft I used so fervently to practise in order to pay my way is more or less abnormal because in one way or another it always involves betrayal."

Well, there are many different ways to betray and *A Handful of Friends* explores most of them: marital betrayals, friendly betrayals, lovers' betrayals, comic, tragic and sleazy betrayals. There are eight scenes spanning less than a week, four couples and the odd woman out, who is a sister. Buzo's hero in *Martello Towers* finished up with his sister (and her pantyhose); Williamson's anti-hero Russell finishes up with sister Jill (and her eternal casseroles). Are sisters being used in Australian drama as mother substitutes for the sad Australian male?

The four couples are Russell, the new History Professor at a new Melbourne university and his shadow wife, Wendy; Mark, the Sydney film-maker and his actress wife, Sally. Sister Jill is a journalist on a trendy mag. They have all known each other forever (Russell, Mark and Wendy have even had a threesome), all except Sally who is of New Australian geneology, and believes you can do anything you want to, a belief that, in Australia, makes her more than usually a candidate for the chopper.

Russell, Mark and Jill all come from one of those little country towns Frank Moorhouse knows like the back of his hand in *The Electric Experience*.

The set consists of Area A: Russell and Wendy's living room with partly visible kitchen/diner beyond. Area B: Jill's modern flat. Area C: a room in an inner city motel (only used once in Act two, Scene two.)

Larry Eastwood's functional and imaginative use of the Nimrod space allows the free flow of the action, and his revolve copes beautifully with the problem of the late introduction of the hotel bedroom set, a key moment in the play.

Peter Carroll as Russell, Peter Sumner as Mark and Anna Volska as Sally take the acting honours. Sumner's soft centred, hypochondriac relentless Mark never puts a foot wrong, and Anna Volska's Sally (Williamson gives her some of the best lines in the play) is a fascinating mixture of vulnerability and hard headedness. Judith Fisher as Wendy and Beryl Marsh as Jill seemed a little dim in comparison, and yet looking back these two sad ladies: wife and sister, do stay in the memory as essential foils for the other more volatile characters.

One of the big risks of the play is Jill's soliloquy in Act one, Scene three. It didn't work on opening night at the Nimrod, but there seems no real reason why it shouldn't. We have the use of the tape recorder to tie it to naturalistic convention, and the monologue, not just there to get over some very essential information (although it does that too) is also part of the psychological portrait, clutching a media symbol.

Perhaps the answer is more dramatic emphasis, and no attempt to underplay. When doing something a bit outrageous be as outrageous as possible.

The unforgettable performance in the gallery of academics we have known is Peter Carroll as Russell McAllister, the comic: sad, witty, violent, self destructive History Professor with a low sperm count. It is no accident that Williamson gives him that so apt second last line. He is the only character in this charade of truth and consequences with enough real insight to make it, and that of course is part of his tragedy as "a clown with dignity".

Russell: A pleasant little society we live in, isn't it?
Jill: I'll be there in ten minutes.

(1) 'Christina Stead *The Exile Returns Unhappily*'; Marion McDonald, *The National Times* Nov 22-27, 1976.
(2) "Droppings, Veges take the piss out of you" Bob Ellis, *Nation Review*, November 19-25, 1976.

OSCAR'S HOLLYWOOD PALACE

CONNELLI AT THE PALACE

PAUL ELLIOT, A.E.T.T.

DEAD EYED DICKS

Barry Eaton

CONNELLI AT THE PALACE Oscars Hollywood Palace JUDI CONNELLI ROSS COLEMAN JAN HOGAN TERENCE M MAHOUB GRANT POMMEROY

DEAD EYED DICKS by Peter King Theatre Royal (opened 22.xii 76) Director Peter O'Toole Designer Hutchinson Scott
Lord Bogmore RICHARD VERNON Lady Bogmore LALLY BOWERS General Moran DONAL McCANN Alice Moran MAOELEINE CANNON Elizabeth Moran SHEILA RUSKIN Molly JUNE BROWN Ceachman DECLANO MULHOLLAND Bunter Mopey Dr Watson Dead Eyed Dicks PETER O TOOLE

Musical comedy is now non-existent in Sydney and with the demise of J C Williamsons its future looks bleak. Mounting production costs and the unavailability of good new material bodes ill for the lover of 'musicals" Only the amateur societies manage to survive

Theatre restaurants are now catering to the demand of the "Special Night Out" Dinner and a show all under one roof for a package price is an attractive proposition for many people these days Certainly Sydney has its fair share of Theatre Restaurants, particularly on the North side of the harbour

Oscar s Hollywood Palace recently opened its doors in Sans Souci and will cater particularly for Sydney's southern and western suburbs

The opening show is *Connelli at the Palace* featuring musical comedy star Judi Connelli

Basically it is a collection of musical comedy numbers spanning the years from the '30s to the '70s This format has been successful at the "Bull 'n Bush" for over ten years now and there is no reason to suppose it will fail at the Hollywood Palace

Judi Connelli, last seen on stage in the ill fated *Applause* twelve months ago, works very hard entertaining the audience She is a very versatile performer and from a bouncy opening goes into the Sweet Charity song "If my friends could see me now" This sets the pace for a tour of the musical comedy world that is to the stage what *That's Entertainment* is to film

Of course every musical comedy star needs a good chorus and clever dance routines Ross Coleman and friends fill the bill admirably although they should stick to singing as a group A couple of solo numbers went astray because of weak singing voices

The show belongs, quite rightly, to Judi Connelli and some of the numbers that I remember particularly are "She s a Star" "42nd Street" and the Andrew Sisters send up There is the inevitable Garland medley and Judi's final is from *Applause* All in good fun

So I guess the message is folks, musical comedy in Sydney is still alive and well and now living at Sans Souci

Judi Connelli and Cast *Photo Oscar's Hollywood Palace*

Richard Vernon & Lally Bowers in Dead Eyed Dicks *Photo Stuart Robinson*

By now we are all familiar with the fact that a fully imported company from England has been making a lightning trip to Australia The magic name of Peter O Toole has lured thousands to Sydney s Theatre Royal to witness a mildly amusing show called *Dead Eyed Dicks*. It is something to be said for the pulling power of an overseas star that people will pay $12 a seat for this show A sizeable number will make this their annual pilgrimage to the theatre

The play itself is a fairly fogettable piece, which, if it ever does reach the West End, will cater for what is known in the business as the 'coach trade' With some good work done by established performers Lally Bowers and Richard Vernon, it could even be quite successful in London's tourist season It needs a lot of polishing before that could happen and we are obviously providing the testing ground

It would appear the only real advantage to the Australian theatre scene from this visit is that it prevented the Theatre Royal from going dark for two and a half months

Actors Equity made a special dispensation for the company to play here, with only seven local understudies getting work, plus a few backstage crew Equity felt it had an obligation to the Royal, having been instrumental in the new theatre being included in the M L C building It would have been most embarrasing if the Royal went dark only ten months after its opening

Fortunately the future of the theatre looks secure after February when the Elizabethan Theatre Trust have firm commitments Manager Freddie Gibson has been working hard to keep the Royal in production and he hopes to confirm a January booking shortly after Theatre Australia goes to print It will be a fully Australian show to join the four local productions already staged

Actors Equity remains firm that *Dead Eyed Dicks* has not set a precedent for overseas companies coming to Australia Each case will be treated on its merits That's their story and they're sticking to it!

OLD TOTE THEATRE COMPANY

ROOKERY NOOK

BLACK THEATRE

HERE COMES THE NIGGER

Katharine Brisbane

ROOKERY NOOK by Ben Travers Parade Theatre (opened 24 xi 76) Director Bill Redmond Designer Alan Lees Gertrude Twine JUDY FARR Mrs Leverett BETTY LUCAS Harold Twine EDGAR METCALF Clive Popkiss RONALD FALK Gerald Popkiss NEIL FITZPATRICK Rhoda Marley LYN CURRAN Putz RIC HUTTON Admiral Juddy RAYMOND MURRAY Poppy Dickay, LIZ MARSHALL Clare Popkiss PAMELA GIBBONS

HERE COMES THE NIGGER by G L Bostock Aboriginal Black Theatre (opened 29 xi 76) Director Jack Charles Sam ATHOL COMPTON Billy KEVIN STEWART Odette JULIE McGREGOR Verna MARCIA LANGTON Neil BRYAN BROWN Bob/Toby ROBERT HANSLEY Ari JOHN BAYLES Tim RON MURRAY Johnny LES SMITH Marsha LORRAINE MAEI WILLIAMS Betty VENIECA DOOLAN

It has been one of those weeks The Prime Minister Mr Fraser had been seen to turn his stony gaze towards those areas of free expression known as the performing arts and the media The newly formed Media Workers' Council was sternly raising forces to save the A B C The Theatre Board of the Australia Council had been sitting and news of its cut backs was beginning to seep through Finding itself with a pretty poorly furnished Christmas stocking and too many vociferous orphans crying for it the Theatre Board had apparently made the choice of putting performance before development meaning by that to save the livelihood of those at present in the profession A worthy aim in a crisis Inevitably, however, the money must end up going to the big theatre companies stuck on their treadmill of yearly repertoire never mind the progress which only risk can achieve I don't blame the Theatre Board We are all reaping a whirlwind today and the hard thinking it is bringing is no bad thing Just as has happened in the A B C in the shipbuilding industry, in uranium mining and elsewhere, the time is fast arriving in the theatre when we shall have to put our jobs on the line and declare what, in Churchill's words, up with we will not put

It was with the hard luck stories of disappointed subsidy applicants in my mind and the militant proposals of the National Playwrights' Conference executive (the A.N.P.C had had its entire $20,000 application refused for the first time) that I went to two plays for *Theatre Australia* which could not be more divergent of the Old Tote's Parade Theatre at the University of N S W Ben Travers's *Rookery Nook*; and at the Black Theatre behind the railway in Redfern G.L Bostock's *Here Comes the Nigger* *Rookery Nook* is an example of the kind of theatre which is to be saved a 1920s farce, not very well done and - to judge by the mood of the audience the night I saw it - sadly out of time and place Mindless rubbish, one might fairly call it if one chose

But it is, of course, not the Old Tote's only current offering At the Opera House Drama Theatre we have the rare joy of seeing Patrick White being performed again - something only a company with Tote's resources could undertake so successfully With *The Season at Sarsaparilla* at one theatre, why not *Rookery Nook* at the other? No good reason at all. Though, oddly, it is the White play that is occupying the more commercial of the two theatres

I am not against *Rookery Nook* as a Christmas show how many times has it been so in its lifetime? What condemns it for me is that the audience found it unfunny and affete It is charmingly designed by Allan Lees and has an experienced comedy cast led by Neil Fitzpatrick Ronald Falk, Judi Farr and Edgar Metcalfe But they were all working too hard tying themselves in knots where the text calls for only the simplest gesture With the exception of Lynette Curran whose Rhoda, the innocent pyjama girl who seeks refuge from her fearsome stepfather with a newly married man, was like the lightest of lemon meringues, the cast puffed around as though they lacked any atom of faith in the play

Bill Redmond is unquestionably capable of directing the play for our enjoyment The fact remains that all these actors have done better work elsewhere In short, the play was out of sorts with its theatre and that, for a farce, is fatal

Here Comes the Nigger, on the other hand, grows out of a theatre on survival rations and the material of the play is, accordingly, basic necessity It may lack elegance but it does have passion and the great advantage the group have over the Tote in this particular case is that they care because it is their own basic necessities, their own immediate experience they wish to express in this play The result is rough theatre but it had me and the rest of the all-white audience sitting on the edge of our seats for reasons other than comfort

The Black Theatre has advanced quite a bit since *The Cake Man* a year ago *Here Comes the Nigger* is directed with confidence by Jack Charles who now has the support of black actors of growing experience like Athol Compton and Marcia Langton and gutsy young white actors like Julie McGregor and Bryan Brown

The hero is Sam (Athol Compton) a blind black who makes leather belts and is studying for his higher school certificate The play opens as he is about to meet a new tutor Odette (Julie McGregor) a sociology student on a part time job Odette takes up with Sam with enthusiasm, partly from attraction, partly from curiosity and admiration and soon finds herself at a storm centre of prejudice both from Sam's black colleagues and from her brother Neil (Bryan Brown), a violent, racist ex Vietnam veteran

The first half is an amiable study of the lifestyle of the urban black in Redfern, touching on domestic habits, money worries, black power the condition of families on the

Ronald Falk, Neil Fitzpatrick, Pamela Gibbons, Judi Farr, Mary Mackay & Betty Lucas in Rookery Nook *Photo: Robert McFarlane*

reservations Most of all it sends up whites, particularly the liberal white trying to understand It is a sharp slap in the face for us whites and its blunt speaking is honestly refreshing

In the second half from the time Neil explodes on the scene the play moves out of that casual reality into a tragic gesture, Jacobean in flavour That it goes too far is due to the author's inexperience and the influence of European drama But at this point that is unimportant. What one retains is that sense of danger and honest passion, of something exciting about to happen maybe not tonight or tomorrow, but not too far around the corner And in retrospect that makes *Rookery Nook* an even sadder object

So what price our developmental programmes?

At this point I would like to mention a third play which poses a particularly tricky problem apropos of this question And this is the recent season in Canberra in the as yet unfinished A.N.U Arts Centre of Roger Pulvers' *Drop Drill* This was directed with great clarity and ingenuity by Ralph Wilson and performed with skill and that same sense of conviction I found at the Black Theatre, by actors including Ann Grey, David Bennett, Marguerite Wells and Ewa Czajot Mr Pulvers, an American Polish, now-naturalised Australian who lectures in Japanese at the A N.U writes in a style which reflects both the Polish and the Japanese theatre and is totally foreign to the average Australian audience I myself do not understand Pulvers' work but its quality is self-evident and this production confirmed me in this view

Drop Drill is an allegory about the conditioning from which human beings suffer in the 20th century, the rituals which have lost their meaning and the means people find for survival The characters include a woman prime minister and her attache, foreign powers, and a family of several generations The setting roughly, is an Asian desert in which the prime minister for a time is lost There is a deal of mime, often very witty To give you some inkling, one of the early scenes is a summit talk conducted by parties who exchange views by playing a variety of instruments, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in embarrassing discord

Theatrically in fact the play works very well and is certainly no more strange than the work of Peter Handke who recently had some vogue in our theatres But when life is tough as it is just now, what place is there in our theatre for such radical originality? Than again when life is tough should not this be the very time to decide our priorities?

To return to Patrick White's *The Season at Sarsaparilla* For all its brilliance, no one can deny that it also contains structural and technical problems which Jim Sharman's fine production did not solve One cannot help ruminating that had the climate of the theatre in the early 60s been more mature, more honestly progressive more of those things we like to think we are after now we might today have greeted this revival without such reservations

Developmental work is by its nature continuous and changing and essential to authors, actors and audience in a wide variety of ways The alternative to change and variety is stagnation and monotony and if we don't take time off from the present pressing financial pressures to get our priorities straight, the danger is we shall be stuck with not very good performances of *Rookery Nook*

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY

MALFI

Michael Morley

MALFI an adaption of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* by Rodney Fisher The Playhouse (opened 11 xi 76) Director Rodney Fisher, Designer Shaun Gurton
ALAN ANDREWS CRAIG ASHLEY JO ENGLAND PATRICK FROST DOUG GAUTIER IAON GUNN PEGGY O BRIEN GEORGE SZEWCOW CLARISSA ZORZAN

Reflecting in the 1950s on the question of adaptation, Brecht observed ' We can change Shakespeare if we can change him ' The quip is far more than a neatly turned paradox for it pre-supposes both the amenability to change of the work in question as well as the dramaturgical sense and sensibility of the prospective adaptor Unfortunately, few authors and directors nowadays seem unduly bothered by the thought of taking another's work and re (or rather mis) shaping it to suit their own often obscure and tortuous ends Rodney Fisher's adaptation and production of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* is a triumphant, brazenly self-congratulatory example of just how ill conceived such an approach can be

Adaptation, as writers like Miller, Duttenmatt and Brecht have shown, can lead to productive and illuminating insights into a work But Rodney Fisher's version not only distorts and confuses Webster's play, it succeeds in making it so boring and tedious that only a re reading of the original convinced me that my recollection of it as a piece full of febrile energy and intense, if often contradictory emotion, was not, in fact, a delusion My respect for Webster's language and sense of dramatic structure has now been re-affirmed in this respect it could be said that the production was successful But this "negative dialectic" is hardly sufficient compensation for an evening in which Webster and the audience both suffered equally severe mishandling

In case it might appear to the uninitiated that the adaptation lacked a concept, two programme notes correct this misapprehension Admittedly, they do point the reader in two opposite directions simultaneously that is, if one can follow the syntax Mr Fisher tells us that "the laborious plot offers little to an audience well-versed in the shorthand techniques and non sequiters (sic) of television and cinema " Now Webster's plot may seem laborious to Rodney Fisher but at least the original managed – though at some length – to suggest who was doing what to whom, where, and sometimes why It is a singular achievement on Mr Fisher's part to have cut the play by half and increased its confusions and "non-sequiters" an hundredfold A modern audience may well be familiar with the shorthand techniques and episodic layout of cinema and television but to follow , let alone understand, *Malfi*, they would need to be cypher experts and free association freaks blessed with prodigious mental agility For while the director's programme note sees the essence of Webster's poetic vision in terms of revolution, oppression and Fate, Jo England presents the unwary reader with a horoscope for the play which is if anything even more confusing

A scene from Malfi *Photo S A T C*

Needless to say, it is difficult to find any realisation of either conceptual outline in the production itself The set no doubt hideously expensive is a carefully chosen mess of dilapidated timber, rusted corrugated iron, asymmetrical doors, ladders, stairwells, screens, etc etc It might have looked appropriate in a production of *Cannery Row* though even then it would have posed just as many physical problems for the actors Its function seemed obstructive, to say the least the sound and spectacle of actors struggling manfully (?) to make themselves heard over unstrategically placed microphones and the clatter of feet on corrugated iron would not usually be considered an essential element in the theatrical experience But then it appears that a number of elements one usually takes for granted were considered irrelevant to this particular production

For example costumes here replaced by what looked like slightly better-tailored versions of the all purpose coarse actor s raiment, preferably in shades ranging from grubby brown to dirty grey Music, and/or sound effects here replaced by what sounded like a tap left on back-stage and an unfortunate series of mishaps with the props table Characters here replaced by a collection of young actors and actresses who were both miscast and inadequate

It was, perhaps, a praiseworthy aim to choose a vehicle for the younger members of the S A T C but almost anything would have been more appropriate than *Malfi* With the exception of Doug Gautier at the beginning (speaking some of the lines Webster once wrote for Delio) and George Szewcow (intermittently as Bosola) no-one really had the opportunity to present a character Peggy O'Brien as Malfi and Jo England and Clarissa Zorzan as her two little maids/acolytes/sisters in-misfortune/ girl friends !?) seemed at times to have drifted in from a somnambulist church hall production of *The Mikado* Often their "choreographed" movements were charged with the same emotional and physical intensity displayed by the ineffable Frida and Agnetha And Alan Andrews white-gowned Cardinal wandered through the set and the text looking rather like a wet Wee Willie Winkie in Wonderland

It is perhaps indicative of the director s close reading of the play that in his version Delio still speaks of the Cardinal in the following terms

> What's that Cardinal? I mean his temper?
> They say he's a brave fellow will play
> his five thousand crowns at tennis
> dance, court ladies, and one that hath
> fought single combats

Of course, there is a division between the inner and outer character in Webster's presentation but to replace his Cardinal by this wraith like figure who squats on a porcelain chamber pot to deliver himself of God knows what, together with one of his more memorable speeches seemed not only unnecessary but totally and gratuitously perverse

Shaw once said that far from cutting Shakespeare, a particular actor/manager had disembowelled him Rodney Fisher has gone a step further He has taken the guts out of Webster set up a two and a quarter hour transplant operation during which he puts a few of the organs back in all the wrong places and has effectively discouraged absenteeism among the unprepared observers by not putting back the one thing that was needed in this production as never before — an interval

Apology Fiona Reilly designed *Miss Reardon* — *Ed*

Peggy O'Brien (left) as the Duchess of Malfi *Photo: S A T C*

NATIONAL THEATRE

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE

Collin O'Brien

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE by Joseph Kesselring Playhouse Director Aarne Neeme Designer Bill Dowd Abby Brewster MARGARET FORD Teddy Brewster ROBERT FAGGETTER Dr Harper IVAN KING Officer Brophy ROLAND PAVER Officer Klein JOHN RAYMENT Martha Brewster NITA PANNELL Elaine Harper PAULINE HOOD Mortimer Brewster DENNIS MILLER Mr Gibbs GEOFF GIBBS Jonathon Brewster LESLIE WRIGHT Dr Einstein JAMES BEATTIE Officer O Hara ROD WILLIAMS Lt Rooney GEOFF GIBBS Mr Witherspoon IVAN KING

Reviewing plays of the *Arsenic and Old Lace* type induces in me what I can only describe as the butterfly-upon wheel or Atticus/Schmatticus syndrome. To start asking questions such as 'What is the relevance of this sort of theatre in Australia today?' or 'Is this what the subsidized theatre should be doing?' is surely to take the sledgehammer to the nut, to overkill, to invite the response 'Ah, jeez, don't come the raw prawn. Why get all heavy about a bit of light entertainment? Youse university types are all the same.' and so on in similar vein. On the other hand to take the line that it is just a diverting, theatre-filling pre-Christmas ha ha (or should it be ho ho?) is perhaps to let go by default what should be a continuing and serious concern: what is and is not the province of theatres subsidized from the public purse.

Not that the Playhouse or its director Aarne Neeme are culpable when it comes to the range of plays they present. This year they have balanced predictable overseas successes with four Australian plays, including local playwright Mary Gage's *Everyone's a General*, and with wayout and experimental plays such as *Casper* and *AC/DC*. But with the rampant philistinism of the economic squeeze the Playhouse looks like having to tread more warily and predictably, so that for the first season of 1977 we are to be offered Moliere's *The Miser*, Williamson's *The Department*, Ayckbourne's *Absent Friends*, Gray's *Otherwise Engaged* and Hampton's *Treats*.

Its not a bad list given the circumstances, and I suppose I'd want to take to task the Government for its shortsighted cheeseparing rather than the Playhouse who have to live with it as best they can. Theatre is a low-import, labour intensive occupation, consisting almost entirely of people who by necessity consume all their income - after all I can't see Rod Williams going out and splurging his earnings on bidding up the price of B H P shares. And the terrible thing is that, in the live theatre, acting is an ephemeral and wasting resource which deteriorates if it is not practised. You can't store it or leave it in the ground like iron ore. The play not done is lost forever, and the value an actor has to give is that much less over a lifetime if he spends a year out of work.

Such morbid thoughts are exacerbated by seeing actors working their guts out over third-rate material such as I am suggesting *Arsenic and Old Lace* is. Even the Saturday night audience with which I shared the experience sat in somewhat glum silence, slow to laugh. I was surprised to find that the script had not stood the test of time, it had dated in both the form of the thing and in what makes us laugh. It suffers from that soft, half-arsed, bourgeois, send 'em home-smiling ness which plagues Broadway to this day, as *The Ginger bread Lady* clearly demonstrates.

Let me be more precise. The plotting is heavy handed, obvious and banal to an astonishing degree, being of the 'oh you mean that nice young man who came to live next door with his widowed sister and that dreadful poodle' variety. Then there is the planting of laughs — and the double, treble, quadruple takes.

It also falls down because one generation's realism no longer holds for the next. Two characters who look and behave like Peter Lorre and Boris Karloff turning up on your doorstep were perhaps credible in the early forties or perhaps we have just changed our acceptable movie fantasies but now the grotesque thrills and funny bits seem thrown in to keep interest alive. Similarly, I think that the central idea of two dotty ladies (played with finesse by Margaret Ford and Nita Pannell) who help lonely old men along to the Happier Hunting Ground with elderberry wine laced with arsenic no longer has enough inherent comedy to sustain the evening. The brother who thinks he is Teddy Roosevelt played at full gallop by Robert Faggetter does still work, perhaps because his world does have its own logic, unlike that of the play.

The acting was never less than competent, although, I got the distinct feeling that some of the comic timing was astray. Or it might be, as I have already suggested, that the play is not inherently witty or funny enough to survive its original novelty value. Dennis Miller plays Mortimer, the one sane if frantic member of the family, as something of a wide boy, two tone shoes and a touch of the Runyon/Bronx. As I remember (dimly, very dimly) from the film the part was played much straighter, so that Mortimer was the normal man trying to overshadow the other players and unbalance the play: perhaps it reflected director Aarne Neeme's intuition that the play did not have the strength to sustain its own weight.

There were also odd and irritating lapses in Bill Dowd's design, particularly in the area of realistic detail. New York's Best and Finest wore caps with black and white checks around them, I'm sure from all those gangster movies relished in my youth that plain black is correct. The stage floor was painted black and unadorned with carpet, which looked dull and stagey. The stair bannister and supports were of plain square wood, which looked strangely modern and severe for a turn-of-the-century house.

I don't mind going to the theatre just to be amused and diverted: not at all. I don't ask to be disturbed and moved all the time (though I do most of the time). The problem here was that the play failed to take my mind for one moment off the plight of the theatre in which it was being presented. This sort of show entails the real journeyman work of the theatre: all the skills on tap all the time. To see such expertise carrying and covering up the paucity of such material always makes me regret that it is not being put to better purpose, and perhaps most when the economic Huns and Visigoths are climbing into their saddles.

Pauline Hood and Dennis Miller — *Photo: National Theatre*

The Beautiful Mrs Portland

by dorothy hewett

Dorothy Hewett's plays are published by Currency Press

ACT II

Scene One — **Autumn**

Scene Two — **Winter**

1915 in Toorak

SCENE ONE

Addie stands in the Portland drawing room arranging Autumn leaves in the vases It is dark, a cold evening outside, and she wears a black coat and skirt, and one of her high necked white blouses She holds herself stiffly as if she was keeping her whole body together by some great act of will Her face is closed and pale The glowing woman of act one has disappeared This is someone for whom it is painful to move and endure in the world There is the sound of a car outside and she stops, her whole body still with listening Then she goes on carefully placing the autumn leaves in the vases Robert passes the gazebo with his light quick step whistling "Sweet Adeline" He uses a key to let himself in through the French doors Addie doesn t turn round The whistle dies away He stands looking at her She is at the fire, standing under her own portrait.

Robert *(awkwardly)* Addie! I didn t notice you there It s getting dark Why don t you turn on the lights?

Addie You never notice me Robert

A pause

Robert I see you everywhere

Addie *moves away placing autumn leaves now on the piano* ***Robert*** *crosses to the fire, warming his hands ostentatiously*

Robert Where s Claire? Where s Tommy? Where s Father?

Addie For an orphan you say that word very easily

Robert I don t say Mother easily

Addie *(ironically)* No

Robert Don t make fun of me Addie You'll never be a mother to me You re not at all like my mother *(he smiles)* My mother was

Addie A lady

Robert Oh! yes very much the lady who married beneath her She used to rest her head on my shoulder *(he mocks her voice)* Keep away from those dirty girls Robbie Don't hurt your mother son

Addie And then she died of asthma

Robert *doesn't answer He stands, staring into the fire*

Robert I loved my mother but she brought me up to idealize women Sex was degrading

Addie Edward is at a board meeting Claire has a fitting in town Tommy's not on leave and it s Rosie s night off so we re alone in the house

Robert. Don t tease me Addie

She moves rapidly to the fireplace and stands deliberately in front of him She touches him gently with her foot. He shrinks back

Addie When my foot touches yours you draw it away as if it contaminated you

He moves impatiently away ***Addie*** *follows.*

Addie Look at me chasing you round the room till you re backed into a corner

Robert Claire does that too

Addie *(turning away)* Does she Then I'll never do it again

Robert *(cruelly)* I kept wondering what you were thinking when we left together that day

Addie I wanted to go with you of course I wanted to be young again I wanted to run out the gate with you hand in hand And then I had — my white nights — clutching my pillows

Robert. You were very quiet You're not often silent but when you are it s devastating (Pause) I've never met a woman as honest as you You re so good for me Addie I need you (He *takes two steps towards her)* I wanted to know you — I was curious and the only way to know a woman is to take her to bed

Addie And now you're found out everything

Robert No you have endless variety

Addie Look at that woman over the mantlepiece, that woman in love You created her Who was that woman? How can she ever go back and walk about the house under her high piled hair with a face like the family goddess **Tell me! How?**

Long Pause

I love you so much *(softly)*

Robert I know and I wish you didn t, because then I could love you so much more

Addie How perverse you are

Robert. Forgive me

Edward *enters upstage right in heavy overcoat and hat, carrying a furled umbrella He walks slowly up the path* ***Robert*** *and* ***Addie*** *watch him approaching* ***Addie*** *crosses and switches on the standard lamps*

Addie You had an attack last night I heard you gasping

Robert It s the cold It s cold enough to be snowing

Addie It never snows in Melbourne, just bluestone and drizzle and calling cards *(very softly)* and festering marriages

Robert *(desperately)* It s snowing on Macedon

Addie *opens the French doors.*

Addie Let me take your hat and coat Teddy You look half perished

She puts up her cheek to be kissed He kisses her She takes his hat, coat and umbrella and exits into the inner room

Robert Come up to the fire sir *(He leads him up to it)*

Edward Thank you Robert

Edward *drops into his fireside chair He looks exhausted*

Robert A whisky?

Edward That s kind of you Robert

Robert *takes it to him.*

Edward *(heavily)* There were dead birds on the road all the way home fallen out of the trees *(Pause)* The news is bad at the front. Our fellows are really getting it

Robert *moves uneasily*

Robert Do you think they know what they re doing sir?

Edward The generals God knows! Not ours to reason why eh!

Robert *(softly)* But ours to do or die

Edward What was that?

Robert *(wryly)* I was just finishing the quotation

Edward Eh? Oh yes, of course

Addie *re-enters*

Addie I didn't expect you home so early tonight

Edward It finished early — we were all cold We wanted our firesides Board rooms are the very devil, and none of us are getting any younger

Addie *(acidly)* Yes so Gracie is always reminding us

(then abruptly)

I'm going up Teddy I'm tired It s been a long day

She moves to the stairs

Edward *(concerned)* Not like you Addie, not sickening for something?

Addie *(impatiant)* No — just tired

Edward Have a nice long rest then dear

Robert: Goodnight

The two men stand stiffly as ***Addie*** *runs lightly upstairs. They watch her go but she doesn t look back* ***Edward*** *pokes the fire He looks up at the painting of* ***Addie*** ***Robert*** *moves, whisky in hand, to the loggie entrance*

Edward She used to pose for me I sculpted her once, but there was a heatwave and she

melted before I could get her caste It was the best thing I ever did I thought I was serious then but I was only dabbling You've almost done it got a lot closer then I did some life force in her, it's dying now I never could reach it, and then I gave up inherited a run down plaster works from my father, pillars, frescoes, gravestones bas bas reliefs and suddenly we were all the fashion, the smart bance halls the classy restaurants the theatres they all wanted their art nouveau! half draped female torsos holding fluted lights in the gloom You're good You should keep it up Why don't you come to the fire?

Robert I like to keep near the air It's because of my asthma My mother died of it

Edward Ant yes I heard you last night Bad was it?

Robert nods bravely

Edward Claire will pull you through You're lucky to have her Strong girl head on her shoulders She'll make something of you

He looks at the painting again.

Her father was a painter That's why she sits so well Brought up to it from a child Rum sort of bird Always half sees over down on his luck never had a brass farthing He used to teach at my Art School She was a model sixteen, came out from behind a faded curtain scowling clouds of raven hair streaked with auburn high bressted *(chuckles)* The coal stove toasted her lovely bum pinks a peony No way to talk about your mother-in-law is it?

Robert She must have been beautiful sir

Edward I married her It wasn't necessary She would have done anything anything then Funny how we went them and take them and tame them make them respectable Then it's all over Beautiful ladies in black skirts and high necked cambric blouses hair piled up butter wouldn't melt in their mouths but if the Toorak matrons had seen her as I first saw her naked and none too clean they'd hoist their skirts and run and there wouldn't be any calling cards on Addie's bress table

Robert It must be hard for a woman who was once that beautiful

Edward (amused) She wouldn't thank you for that

Claire enters the garden upstage right, dressed stylishly in a fur trimmed costume, fur hat and high heeled boots A fur muff covers her hands Her face is glowing She enters through the glass doors with a whirl of skirts

Claire Hello my darlings what a wild world outside

She kisses Robert on the mouth, twirls across the room and kisses Edward on top of the head

Aughl Mother's filled the house with her autumn leaves How dreary

She whirls about the room showing herself off

Do you like my new costume? Isn't it divine? Do I look beautiful?

Robert I've never seen you looking so fine Claire

(stiffly)

Claire sinks down on the sofa She smiles archly

Claire Pour me a drink Robbie please It's perishing cold outside and whirling and bark What a night for a warm bed and a husband

(She smiles at Robert over her drink The two men are embarrased but delighted at her)

I'm worn to the bone The fittings took hours nothing went right I'm warning you I'm going up early darling

Robert (stiffly) You don't have to threaten me

Claire No, well I don't suppose so

She laughs lightly

Daddy you're looking so worn Have you been overdoing it?

Edward I've endured another board meeting

Claire Why don't you let Robert go proxy for you I'm sure he'd do it beautifully

She has finished her drink and rises

You two have been having a talk, that's good I like to see my loved ones getting on well together

Claire moves to the stairs

Coming Robbie?

She holds out her hand He moves awkwardly towards her

(gaily) It's a pleasure to go up to bed now so luxurious since you gave the master bedroom to Robert and me ***(to Edward)***

Robert and Claire stand together at the foot of the stairs

Edward (heavily) Your mother and I don't use it It's nice to see it occupied

Claire blows Edward a kiss from the stairs

Claire Now don't mope down here on your own You know it makes you feel morbid

Robert Goodnight sir *(Pause)* I enjoyed our conversation

Edward (smiling) Confidences Robert

Robert Yes, that's a better word for it

He pauses embarrassed but genuinely moved to say it

It's very pleasant to be part of a family

Edward Thank you Robert Sleep well And Claire you do look beautiful You look just like your mother

Claire. (coldly) Goodnight Daddy

Arm round each other's waists Robert and Claire climb the stairs as Robert and Addie climbed in Act One

In the silence Edward sighs and pokes the fire He closes his eyes, as we see Charlie enter from downstage right, and pass the gazebo dishevelled and desperate, half running through the garden He knocks loudly on the glass doors Edward wakes with a start, rises with difficulty and goes to the door He sees Charlie's contorted face through the glass, and hurried lets him in

Edward For God's sake Charles What's the matter?

Charlie is shaking so badly he can't speak

Edward takes off his hat and overcoat drapes them over the sofa and brings him down to the wing chair by the fire He pours Charlie a stiff whisky)

Edward (alarmed) Out with it man Is it Gracie?

Charlie nods dumbly

I'll wait here quietly until you've calmed yourself Then you can tell me

Edward pours himself a drink Charlie gulps his whisky and half rises

Charlie I don't know why I came to you Edward

Edward There must have been some good reason

Charlie I expect I wanted to get here first before her

Edward Where's Gracie?

Charlie makes a grim attempt at humour

Charlie She's put her head in the gas oven, walked under a tram, jumped off the St Kilda pier, and she never learnt to swim

Edward Women trouble is it?

Charlie In a manner of speaking all my life's been like that I've made a spectacle of myself since puberty

He begins to cry Edward is terribly embarrassed and takes an agitated turn or two round the room

I know you all laugh at me clutching at their privates in halls and bathrooms wherever I can Decent women run when they see me I'm a bull on heat hitched to an icy frog, with a French figure

He laughs at himself and leans forward Edward perches nervously on the arm of the sofa lighting his pipe

Charlie She's your own sister but have you ever known what it was like to be bound to a woman who make your flesh creep

Edward shakes his head

Then you're lucky man, lucky

Charlie gets up moves agitatedly round the room

So I found myself a mistress and ran away We've lived in a grimy room in Richmond for two whole days I thought we'd never be found, but Gracie found us She thrust her great tits against the door, howling and booing My God it was horrible She went for my women with her nails She smashed the few sad cups and saucers we'd gathered together She broke the window with the other lodgers gawping on the landing And I ran I ran like a coward and left that woman to face her

He returns to the fire and stares into it gloomily

God knows where Gracie is now the poor fat sow For the most terrible thing of all is Teddy she loves me I'm her life her meaning her whole security If I run to the ends of the earth she'll get me back If I kill myself she'll kill herself and come after me and I believe in heaven and hell I'm an elder in the Methodist church God help us all Teddy

Edward crosses and places his hand on Charlie's shoulder

Edward You're in no fit state to discuss it now

Charlie If I don't discuss it now I never will

Edward Sleep on it Stay in the spare room tonight and tomorrow morning we'll talk it out, you and Grace and I

Charlie grabs at Edward's coat sleeve

Charlie Not Grace I tell you I can't face her

Edward (soothingly) We'll work it out

Charlie (dully) And I'll go back to her

Edward You're an honourable man What else is there to do?

Charlie (savagely) And feel up their cunts in the closets, and touch their titties until I'm too old to fumble envmore I wish she'd die

Edward (primly) I'll pretend I haven't heard you say that Charlie

He helps Charlie to his feet, and takes him, stumbling to the inside door

Charlie Pretence pretence That's all our lives are pretence How long is it since you slept with your wife Teddy? Do you think you could even do it enymore?

(Edward ignores this and they exit inside the house, as Addie comes downstairs in her nightgown and wrap She goes to the fire and gazes into it, her face cold and calm Edward re-enters He goes to Addie and puts his arm around her She stiffens

Edward Did we wake you Addie?

Addie I heard a noise I came down

Edward It was only Charlie I took him up to the spare room Some domestic matter It'll all blow over

Addie Poor Charlie! ***(She sits in the armchair)***

Edward You won't sleep now I know you when you're disturbed

Addie I think I'll sit up just for a little I'll read or maybe sew

Edward bends stiffly over her hair, kisses it

Edward Goodnight then my dear
Addie Goodnight Teddy ... good Samaritan
He smiles at her weerily then goes upstairs, hanging to the hendrail **Addie** *waits until he leaves, then she sinks down on the carpet end buries her head in her hends*
Addie (weeping) Robbie Robbie
Tom enters from the inner room door, goes quickly to her
Tom What are you whispering for Mother?
She looks up He kneels down beside her, rocking her as she sobs
Mother Mother what is it? Don't cry like that Don t cry my darling
Tom is kissing her hair in en excess of love and concern.
Addie (slowly) You ve come to tell me you re going?
Tom nods his head
Addie When?
Tom Tomorrow The troop ship leeves in the early morning
Addie Can I come odwn?
He nods still holding her
And then my lest friend hee gone from this terrible house
He lifts up her fece.
Tom What nonsense is this your telling me?
Addie It e the truth I can t communicate with your father or with Claire Oh! we keep the decencies we converse the seesone pass the house runs on
Tom (very still) And Robbie?
Addie (bitterly) And lesat of all with Robbie
Tom (puzzled but pleased) I thought that you end he
Addie (violently) Then you thought wrong
Tom smiles triumphantly
Tom (like e bright child) Let s art like we used to when I came home from boarding school After all that bullying I d lie with my head on your lap Telling my secrets to you was such fun
Addie moves so that **Tom** *is lying across her kneas like e young lover Occesionelly she puts her lips to his heir*
Addie You ve neglected me You haven't been home for eges Haven't they given you any leave at all?
Tom looks up at her wickedly
Tom I've been chasing other girls
Addie (smiling) Did they accommodate you darling?
Tom It e the uniform You ve no ides how easy it all is now I'm dressed for death end so ... they lift their generous skirts I won t be telling in the p ace they think I'm going
Addie puts her fingers to his lips but he pulls them ewey
Tom No, I like them mother All those smelly little girls with their dirty drawers lurking on the Princess Bridge late at night with their pinked cheeks end sheedwy eyes *(He imitates them)* ' C mon ome wiv me love — Come ome wiv me soldyer
Addie You might catch e disease, Tommy
Tom And I might be dead before the yeer's out so kiss me Mother
She bends end kisses him on the lips
Common little trollops! They all kiss like you *(dreamily)*
He beings to sing softly
Mademoiselle from Armentieres, parlez-vous,
Mademoiselle from Armentieres, parlez-vous
Mademoiselle from Armentieres, hesn't been kissed for thirty yeers
Inky pinky parlez vous
His voice dies away The clock strikes **Tom** *is dozing as* **Addie** *stares on into the fire*
CURTAIN

SCENE TWO

It is e late evening in middle winter Figures in deep mourning sit or stend stiff and motionless in the Portland sitting room The vases are full of white cherry blossom **Claire, Grace and Charlie** *sit on the sofa* **Addie** *stends staring into the fire* **Robert** *is in his fevourite place, staring out into the loggia. The velvet curtains are drawn out of respect for the deed.*
Rosie *enters from the interior door She has been weeping end her face is swollen She hiccups as she pushes the tee trolley into the silent room, offering tee end cekes to everyone*
Only **Gracie end Cherlie** *take them*
Addie *(brutelly)* Will someone tell that wretched girl to shut her mouth
Grace clatters her cup nervously against the saucer **Claire** *motions* **Rosie** *out of the room, lips pressed close together She exits with great blubbering sobs*
Claire It e not the girl's fault She was fond of him You can be brutal Mother
They look at each other with pure dislike
Grece It was e lovely memorial service What e pity Edward couldn't be there to see it It would have helped him in his grief
She takes out e lace hendkerchief end sniffles.
Addie *(tonelessly)* Edward killed him
Claire How dare you say that how dare you
She jumps up end moves towards **Robert** *for protection her hend clutching his sleeve, but* **Robert** *makes no sign.*
(trembling) How dare she say that Robert?
Robert You re upset Go upstairs sit with your Father for e while He d like that wouldn't he?
Numbly **Claire** *obeys him, moves towards the stairs end exits*
Addie *(after her)* Edward was the bloody patriot He only went to please Edward It was the only time Edward ever smiled at him
Grace She's e good brave girl *(looking after Claire)*
Addie I don't think I can bear much more Will you go home now Grece?
Cherlie jumps to his feet
Cherlie Of course Addie
He moves towards her
Addie And if you lay e finger on me Cherlie I think I'll slit your throat.
Cherlie stricken, stumbles for the glass doors
Grace scuttles after him
Grace *(icily)* Good evening Robert
Robert *inclines his head* **Grace end Cherlie** *exit past the gazebo,* **Cherlie** *striding ahead.*
Grace *trotting to keep up with him There is e long silence*
Addie Oh! my God it's terrible terrible
She turns end runs blindly into **Robert's** *arms He holds her close, smoothing her heir*
Robert *(tenderly)* There e grey in your hair Addie
They kiss passionetely **Rosie** *pushes open the door e teetray in her hend It crashes to the floor She stends staring open mouthed from the doorway* **Addie** *end* **Robert** *jump guiltily apart* **Rosie** *backs out of the room, still staring her hands at her mouth leaving the teetray on the carpet* **Claire** *runs down the stairs in her hat end coat She stends staring at them from the lending* **Addie** *end* **Robert** *ere still by the entrence to the loggia but they have broken apart.* **Claire** *moves across, picks up the teetray, puts it cerefully on the occesionel table*
Claire Father was esleep She woke up Father
Robert She s nervous that s all Jumpy! We're all jumpy.
Claire looks at her mother
Claire Yes we ere *(She speaks to* **Robert**, *ignoring her mother)*
I want you to take me out out of this house now tonight
Robert *(stupidly)* Out of this house

Claire *(impatient)* Oh! I don't mean forever, nothing melodrematic like that Let s go to e restaurent e music hell, anything just to get out of this terrible house, because — Robert it e killing us too
Robert *looks weerily from* **Claire** *to* **Addie**
Robert Don t you think ?
Claire *(dangerously)* Get me out of this house I don t care what people think Get me out!
Without e word **Robert** *takes* **Claire's** *arm end they exit into the garden end offstege upper right* **Addie** *stends motionless for e moment, then she crosses to the wing chair end sinks into it, holding her body with crossed arms, end rocking to and fro She has grown slightly heavier in the last few months* **Edward** *comes downstairs very slewly, hanging to the stair rail, in dressing gown end pyjames, his face white end old his hands shaking*
Edward You're all alone Addie
(She nods her head)
The children have gone out?
(She nods again)
Best for them
Edward moves into the room and stends beside her
The young ones get over things quickly It's you end I who must bear it best my dear
She shekes her head
Please look at me
She lifts her head hatred in her face He starts back
Addie!
Addie *(in e low voice)* You killed him with your ridiculous old fashioned patriotism You never loved him end he tried to model himself on you on you God knows why He was worth e odzen of you young bright, sensitive full of such joy that you had to destroy him Just like you destroy me
Edward clings to the mentlepiece.
Edward Please Addie, I'm old I'm tired
Addie *(cruelly)* You re elweye tired I wish you were tired to death
He winces
Edward Do you mean that?
Addie Oh! God knows what I mean I wse young Teddy I was full of life end you did me in just like you ve done in Tommy He was the one bright thing in all our lives the only one I could telk to And now he s e name on e wooden honour roll in e Toorek church That young thing! Claire's like you, cold, aloof and e schemer I'm not like that I'm riot old
She stands end faces him
I want to live Teody I want to feel — I want to tremble under a men How long is it since you made me tremble?
Edward takes her in his arms end holds her close.

Edward I didn't know my darling Forgive me I didn t know I thought it was past all that I thought it wes all over
Edward is caressing her hair, kissing her throat, end hends
Addie Come upstaire now, come upstairs with me Teddy

She is drawing him across the room after her
He stumbles once (softly) Show me how you can take me still show me
She moves slowly up the stairs pulling him with her until they disappear
QUICK BLACKOUT
MUSIC TO COVER 'MY ROSARY'
The garden and the sitting room are in darkness but there is something hanging in the gazebo. Grace stumbles past without looking at it She rings the bell several times. Nobody comes. She rings more desperately, keeping her finger on the bell Rosie enters from inside the house, dragging her feet She has cried herself out. She switches on the lights and opens the door Grace tumbles into the room, eyes wild, hat askew
Rosie Why Mrs Crossing you give me such a turn What s up then? Sit down Get your breat Oh! but you do look terrible
Grace I ve got to see my brother Rosie I ve got to see him alone
Rosie E s asleep Mrs Crossing You know e s not been well
Grace You call my brother Rosie You've got to call him
Rosie I ll get Mrs Portland She'll know what to do
Addie appears in a red velvet dressing gown at the top of the stairs
Addie Who is it Rosie?
Rosie. (stage whisper) It s Mrs Crossing and is she in a state
Addie crosses towards Grace
Gracie has risen from the sofa and is backed against the glass doors like an animal, shaking her head from side to side.
Grace I won t see you Addie You're cruel and heartless You never were on my side You lead him on like all the others like all the beautiful ones With your mouth and your breasts and your thighs you re evil
She crouches madly against the door and begins to wail
Do you know what he said to me He said I disgust him He said I make him impotent – I'm like s toad spitting venom all over his life Oh! Addie Addie and I love him God help me I love him Addie I can t let him leave me He s my husband You understand
She slumps on the floor, blubbering Addie tries to pick her up but can't manage it Rosie stands open mouthed backed against the inner door
Addie Don't stand there gawping Help me She weighs a ton
They struggle with the sobbing Grace to the sofa She sits slumped against Rosie's shoulder, eyes closed, moaning softly now, holding Rosie's hand Addie moves quickly to the whisky bottle pours a stiff slug and forces it between Gracie s lips
Rosie It s awfright Mrs Crossing, it s medicinal
Addie. She s coming round
Grace looks up at Addie, her eyes staring
She catches at Addie s sleeve, whispering
Grace I can t find him anywhere and I'm afraid
Addie goes to the glass doors and peers into the garden
Addie He s probably out there waiting for you now
Grace No he left me on the street and he slapped my face *(babbling)* There was a terrible scene People stared Then he began to run I tried to follow him but I couldn t keep up I called out, "Charl Charl, come back, but he never turned round once You don t know what it s like Addie, no men has ever hated you because you were ugly Then I thought I'll come here I'll come to Edward Edward s family He'll know what to do He sent Charl back to me once before So I started walking through the rain and all the time I had the strangest feeling that Charl was following me The streets were very dark and it was eerie the way I d hear these footsteps and then when I stopped and held my breath they stopped and there was nothing Nothing at all
Rosie Oooh!
Addie is still staring out the glass doors but her eyes have focused on the gazebo She is hardly listening to Gracie's story Rosie is wide eyed, entranced on the sofa, living it all
Addie (absently) Now calm yourself Give Mrs Crossing another stiff whisky Rosie
Grace He said 'What whore s bitch called you Grace? Whose rotten joke was that?"
Rosie, shocked, crosses to the table, pours Grace another whisky She gulps it down
Addie Now listen to me Grace I m going out to look for Charlie I'll be away a little time Rose will look after you Anything you want just ask her But you re not to disturb Edward, do you hear He s a sick man and I won t have him disturbed
Addie steps out into the garden Rosie lifts Gracie s feet up onto the sofa, takes her shoes off puts a pillow under her head Grace moans and closes her eyes Rosie crosses to the wing chair and sits watching Grace
Addie moves slowly across the gazebo. She stands there staring at the dark shape dangling from the cross beam The lights of a car sweep across the garden There is the sound of a car engine stopping The lights go out Claire runs in upper right followed by Robert, Addie turns and faces them For a moment they all stand frozen staring at the gazebo
Robert Jesus! Oh! Jesus! Addie
Robert runs forward and cuts the dead body of Charlie down. The body lies sprawled in the gazebo Together they stand staring at it
QUICK BLACKOUT
MUSIC TO COVER "TOSTI'S GOODBYE"
It is very late on the same night A fire burns in the grate, the lights are all extinguished There is no sound in the room. A shadow sits hunched on the sofa It is Addie She wears her white muslin dress from Act One Her hair is loose on her shoulders, her feet bare There is a sound of a car engine stopping Addie smoothes her hair and listens Robert hurries across the garden from upstage right and lets himself in at the glass doors shaking the rain off his coat He doesn t see Addie hunched on the sofa He moves, breathing heavily, head held high, to the entrance of the loggia
Addie Robert!
He jumps and swings around
Robert (awkwardly) I didn t see you there
Addie Where s Claire?
Robert I left her at the hospital, with Grace I was having difficulty with my breathing She insisted I come back
Addie (wryly) To me?
Robert To you both She was worried about you *Pause* Grace clings to her you know Claire and Father are the only ones she trusts
Addie She doesn t trust me She says I m too beautiful She says I'm the devil
She laughs without joy
Robert What tricks are you up to Addie?
Addie No tricks Tonight I've been dutiful I've been with my husband Robert, and do you know the only way I could do it shut my eyes and pretend I was a whore for you I did it for us to save us do you understand?
Robert crosses and turns on the two standard lamps.
Robert. There's nothing to save Give up It's all over Addie
Addie. (mocking) You've decided to be a good husband now is that it?
She kneels up on the sofa He is staring at her
Robert Your gown shimmers Why are you dressed like that?
Addie. It s the way you painted me last summer Remember, when I thought my life was over, dried up finished all my juices gone Why are you always so dry Addie Edward asked me? But by God Robbie I d only just begun You wakened me up, my whole body, everything came back everything I'd forgotten All day long all I could think about was when you d come to me naked in my bedroom with a line of soft black fur like an animal down your buttocks and take me three times in a night
Robert (stiffly) Somebody will hear you
He turns his back on her
Addie. Not lying on me heaving slowly with a great belly forcing me into the mattress but teasing me taking me stabbing me like lightning –
He swings round She moves like a cat off the sofa and stalks him round the room as he backs away from her
Until both of us together with great gasps fell off the edge of the world
She has forced him back to the sofa He sits as she falls across him seducing him kissing his lips with rapid teasing kisses.
And I said "I've never had a lover like you before" and you said, 'It s not me it s you You re the most beautiful creature in the world" and I whispered, "That s because I want you so badly"
His arms are around her now and he is returning her kisses
I've missed you my darling
Robert I've missed you too
Addie Why didn't you trust me? I'd never give you away
Robert Why did you go to him?
Addie You want to her – every night
Robert She s my wife
Addie He s my husband
Robert You told me that was all finished
Addie Oh! Robert, Robert, so now I have to be a nun for you too
Robert places her gently aside and looks out through the curtains into the winter garden, then crosses and turns out the lights
Robert It was too dangerous for us here in the house I knew we d be caught sooner or later
He has checked the garden now he goes to the foot of the stairs listening. She is watching him She has done her best Now it is his turn to act
Robert Claire won't be home all night Edward s asleep –
He hesitates, then suddenly smiling winningly he holds out his hand to her
Robert (softly) Come upstairs with me now
Addie crosses the room and takes his hand.
Addie (demurely) Yes darling
Robert It s madness You know that don't you?
She nods her head He pulls her violently into his arms. They kiss passionately
Robert Maybe that s what I want something to force me to go I haven t painted in months
Addie I'll wake you before dawn breaks
Robert You re so clever Addie You

men pulate ma but in bed wa change places I m the hunter You allow me to hunt you

Addie That s why it s so good in our bed

They move upstairs together arms round each other, pausing once on the landing to kiss again They they disappear in the darkness at the top of the stairs **Claire** *enters from the inner rooms grim lipped white faced She listens at the foot of the stairs hesitates, then crosses to poke the fire. She huddles in the wing chair, and slowly a grey dawn light steals into the room.* **Rosie** *opens the inner door yawning dishevelled carrying a coal scuttle She starts to see* **Claire** *in the armchair, curled up her eyes closed but shrugs and replenishes the fire sniffing loudly to attract Claire s attention*

Claire *(opening her eyes wearily)* What are you sniffing for Rosie?

Rosie *(in a rush)* I m havin' a baby miss Your brother put me in the family way before 'e went off to France

Claire *(coldly)* You re accusing Tommy?

Rosie *(indignant)* I m not accusing nobody We was havin it orf before e went that e all E liked a bit of a slap and tickle did Mr Tom An e couldn t get orf wiv girls of is own class They was too refined But I was easy y see I was just is match

She moves across the carpet shuffling on her knees wheeding at **Claire s** *feet*

Y won t turn me out wi ly Miss Claire? I mean Mrs Dean I know I won t be respectable ever again but you ll look after me now won t yous you an Mr Portland?

Claire *places her hand on* **Rosie's** *head in an absent minded gesture*

Claire I ll look after you Rosie

Rosie Thank you miss Especially now Tommy s dead My kids all you got to remember im by

Rosie gets up off her knees and goes to the inner door

I wouldn t tell er Mrs Portland She wouldn t like it

She pauses turns back

I was cleanin' out Mrs P s room yesterday mornin Miss an I found this under er bed One of them cuff links you give to Mr Dean for an engagement present

She rummages in her apron pocket, takes out the cufflink, crosses and hands it to **Claire** *Their eyes met*

Claire *(Coldly)* Thank you Rosie

Rosie So there ll alwiz be an 'ome for us era wen t there Miss Claire I c n depend on that can t I?

Claire inclines her head, and **Rosie** *exits, as* **Edward** *comes to the landing in his pyjamas and dressing gown*

Edward I heard voices It's terribly early dear

Claire The dawn s just breaking Come down Father I want to talk to you

Edward descends the stairs

Edward Where s all the mystery?

Claire Father this is going to be the most dreadful shock to you but I can t spare you any longer Upstairs in her bedroom my mother is fornicating with my husband

Edward stands rooted stiff at the bottom of the stairs.

Edward Have you taken leave of your senses?

Claire *stands trembling holding onto the mantlepiece*

Claire Father I d have given anything not to tell you

He stares at her

They re up there now, in each others arms Why don t you go upstairs and kill them both

Edward Do you hate her so much?

Claire Of course I do She s an adulteress isn t she?

Edward And Robert?

Claire *(anguished)* No I don t hate Robert It's not his fault She seduced him No don t hurt Robert

She sinks down again in the chair her head in her arms **Edward** *crosses, concerned for her*

Edward My poor poor child

He puts his hand on her hair **Claire** *looks up, tearstarred*

Claire Robert loves me

Edward *(dryly)* Does he? How do you know? How does anyone know what love is? Define love for me Claire You seem to know all the answers

Claire *falls to her knees, clasping her father weeping*

Claire Oh! I don t, I don t I m only pretending Father I don t know anything I don t know anything

Edward *strokes her hair, raises her to her feet.*

Edward Then stop these mad accusations They only destroy love

Claire You don t believe me do you?

Edward It s jealousy only jealousy of a beautiful woman

He turns away, takes his pipe from the occasional table, lights it.

These scenes are not good for you Claire neither me

His hands are trembling He is not as calm as he seems.

Claire *(hoarsely)* Then go upstairs and find out for yourself

Edward hesitates, goes on filling his pipe.

Edward I wouldn t demean myself or any of us by doing a thing like that

Claire *(scornfully)* You re frightened You re frightened of what you might see

Edward *(very angry)* I'm warning you Claire

Claire *turns dreamily back to the fire*

Claire. It s all right Father I understand I couldn t confront them up there either *(She clings to the mantlepiece)* I m so deathly tired

Edward *faces her his whole body shaking*

Edward Why did you have to tell me?

They stare at each other in silence. An admission has been made **Edward** *turns away from her and pours himself a drink* **Claire** *crosses to the bell pull* **Rosie** *enters warily*

Claire Rosie I want you to go and waken my mother It s time my mother was up and about

Edward *stiffens but doesn t turn round.*

Rosie *(alarmed)* I don't like to miss

Claire *(brutally)* Do as you re told

Rosie *backs away* **Claire** *becomes calm and controlled again*

Just knock on the door and say, ' Miss Claire would like to see her mother in the sitting room

Rosie. It s terrible early miss and she ad such a bad night with Mrs Crossing an all

Edward swings round as **Rosie's** *voice dies away*

Edward What about Mrs Crossing?

Claire. *(quickly)* Oh! Daddy just that Aunt Grace was here, upset about Uncle Charlie It s all resolved now

Edward Why didn't somebody wake me?

Claire We didn't want you disturbed

Edward looks at her ironically **Claire** *turns back to Rosie*

Claire. *(grimly)* Now do what I say

Rosie, frightened runs upstairs They can hear her thumping on the bedroom door, calling

Rosie. Mrs Portland — Mrs Portland, Miss Claire wants you in the sitting room

Edward *(furiously)* My God! It s enough to wake the dead

Claire *walks to the glass doors and pulls back the velvet curtains She stands staring into the cold winter garden* **Rosie** *re enters*

Rosie She ll be right down miss

Rosie gives **Claire** *and* **Edward** *one frightened glance and whisks into the inner room* **Claire** *crosses to the loggia She is stage managing her big scene*

Edward Are you satisfied now?

Claire Daddy I want you to go out on the loggia before she comes down

Edward It s cold out there Claire

Claire. You owe me this much

Edward It s not honourable

Claire Honour *(she laughs)* There s none in this house

Edward *(warning her)* If it s true that swine leaves my roof

Claire Then I will go with him

Edward *(furious)* Oh! for God s sake Claire

Claire It won t take too long I promise you

He walks across the room and out onto the loggia. **Claire** *pulls the velvet drapes to shield him* **Edward** *stands, smoking his pipe, restless, agitated As* **Claire** *turns* **Addie** *comes downstairs in her dark suit*

Addie You want to see me Claire?

Claire Yes Mother

Addie I didn t know you were home

Claire I know you didn t

Addie goes to the fire, and bends herself to warm her hands struggling for composure.

Addie Is Grace?

Claire I left Aunt Grace in the competent care of the hospital heavily sedated

Out on the loggia **Edward** *takes a step forward, but stops as* **Claire** *continues*

Claire I came home and let myself in the back way I waited there listening I heard Robert s car I heard what you both said I heard you go upstairs together

In the long pause neither the two women nor **Edward** *move a muscle Then* **Addie** *stands upright and faces* **Claire**

Addie Then there s nothing to say

On the loggia **Edward** *turns away and looks unseeing at the garden*

Claire There s a great deal to say I ve rehearsed it all very carefully sitting here by the fire You will pack a travelling bag, and you will go down the garden path and never come back

Addie Taking Robert with me Oh! please spare me your schoolgirl melodramatics darling

Addie crosses to the occasional table, pours herself a stiff drink There is a movement from the top of the stairs. It is **Robert** *looking uneasily down at them*

Claire *(ironically)* Why Robbie what a surprise Rested already after your labours?

Robert comes downstairs, holding himself very stiffly

Addie *(lightly)* She knows all about us darling She s been playing I spy

Robert walks straight to the loggia entrance, holding his head high, breathing heavily He goes to walk through but sees **Edward** *there hands clenched, staring at him Hunted he turns back into the room, and stands motionless, like an animal in a glare of light*

Claire. I think it s time I told Daddy

Addie I wouldn t do that if I were you Claire His heart

Claire (savagely) How dare you talk about his heart when you ve broken it But I don t think the shock will kill him He s a lot tougher than you think But you re finished Mother, make no mistake about that You ra the one who s going

Addie I m not going This is my home

Claire It was your home

Addie If I go Robert goes with me

She turns to him

Claire How strangely silent our Rodert is this morning

Addie crosses to Robert, takes his hand

Addie Come with me Robie Let s go away together This is the chance we ve been waiting for We can go now it s all over

Claire You don t know him as well as you should Mother

Addie (pleading) Remember how we talked about Greece a house in the country

Edward on the loggia has turned away, defeated If he could he would put his hands over his ears.

Claire He s got no money and neither have you

Robert (miserably) I can t go away with you Addie

Addie plays her last card

Addie (triumphantly) And what if I tell you I m pregnant I m having our child

Robert gasps looks wildly onto the loggia Claire s face goes very still she gives one quick involuntary cry Edward swings round He and Robert stare at each other horrified Edward grips the loggia pillar for support, and staggers

Claire (like ice) You and the servant girl What a fertile household we are to de sure

Addie (stupidly) Rosie pregnant?

Claire (cruelly) Yes to my dead brother He didn t confide that little secret to you did he?

Addie smiles gently

Addie Poor Tom We must look after the baby

Claire. (flatly) I ve arranged all that She ll get the dest of attention But what about you Mother What plans have you got for your confinement?

Addie turns to Robert catches his sleeve.

Addie Why do you think I went to Teddy last night prostituted myself in his bed? It was to save us my darling

Robert backs away horrified revealing Edward clinging to the pillar for support, staring at Addie es if she was e murderous stranger Addie stumbles back from both of them

Addie (whispering) You d let me go out there into the world pregnant with nothing and never see you again

It ie not a question but e statement of a fact she has just faced for the first time, but still can't quite believe

Robert. (in e low voice) Yes Addie you ve always known I would You knew that about me so you slept with Edward last night to save yourself

Claire But you reckoned without me Mother You underestimated me all of you

Addie. (softly) Yes indeed we did my clever, ruthless daughter *(she turns centre.)*

Claire. (to Robert) I warned you once not to underestimate me

Addie (tired to death) Why don t you bring your Father in from the loggia It s cold out there He ll catch his death

Claire crosses to the loggia and brings Edward into the room, holding his lax hand

Edward moves like a sleepwalker

Claire. (proudly) Father and I plenned all this farce together You were fools Daddy we can't live in this house with this woman She s made everything foul You can t live with her now

Edward stares at Addie's bowed shoulders.

She s pregnant to him Don't you understand?

Edward (dully) Yes I understend

Claire Then tell her to go...

Edward is still silent, staring at Addie

Claire. Either she goes or I do

Edward (dully) Yes I understand

Claire. Then tell her to go

Edward is still silent, staring at Addie

Claire Either she goes or I do

Addie turns end her eyes meet Edward's

Addie (faintly) Teddy ...

Edward You used me Addie That e whet I can t forgive You used my body what s left of it my trust our marriage

His voice breaks.

Addie (wearily) We all use esch other Didn t you tell me that once Robert And we did that didn t we? We ve lived in this house end used each other

Claire crosses impatiently back to the fireplace.

Claire. Go upstairs and pack your bag and leave quietly Robert is not going with you Father is not going to save you He and I are both absolutely ruthless when it comes to e question of honour, and Rodert has no honour at all

Edward Honour! *(he laughs coldly looking at Robert)*

Robert stands on one side of the loggia entrance, taking deep breaths, Edward on the other Claire stands with her implacable back to the fire Addie looks from one to the other, but finds nothing there She moves slowly across the room, and like en old woman begins to climb the stairs. She turns.

Addie I won t ask you to forgive me Claire,

Claire. (cruelly) Save your sermons for someone else You've lost the right to preach them

Addie mounts the stairs Edward moves forward his face working

Edward: What will become of her?

Claire. That isn t our affair any longer She s betrayed us

Edward swings round on Robert

Edward. (with hatred) There e our Judas There's our betrayer

Robert (quietly) But I loved her too

Edward (astonished) You loved each other?

Robert (desperately) I loved you all

Edward his anger evaporated, moves heavily towards the wing chair and slumps into it, stering into the fire

Edward What terrible things we do in the name of love

Claire (hissing at Robert) Don't use that word love You were infatuated with her

Her eyes beat him down

Robert Yes

Claire For e time?

Robert (flatly) Yes

Claire. You lusted after her but that time e over

Robert is silent, head bowed

Is it? *(terribly)*

Robert. (faintly) Yes

He turns away stering into the loggia

Robert (to Edward) Tell me to go I m trying to make you tell me to go and if you do I can never come back again can I?

Claire. (grimly) You won t go with her Robert Why you d be the laughing stock of all our friends Swap your young wife for her old mother, end e dotard child The whole of Melbourne would de roaring

She laughs lightly The two men wince

We ll never tell you to go We won't make it easy for you Never

Rosie enters with the tea trolley Silently and afraid she takes tea to Claire Edward and Robert They sip mechanically Addie comes downstairs in a dark travelling coat, a stylish black hat set on her piled hair, her face pale as death. She carries e travelling bag Not one of them meet her eyes. Only Rosie looks bewildered, concerned. The family faces are stoney, withdrawn, exhausted Addie slowly pulls on her black gloves She looks from one side to the other with a little smile. Then she goes to the glass doors, puts down her bags fumbles with the key Rosie hurries to help her but Claire puts up an imperious hand Addie opens the door and speaks to Robert for the last time

Addie What will happen to you now there s no one to tell you the truth?

Robert I don t know

His eyes beg for forgiveness. She smiles at him

Claire Don t worry Mother I ll tell him

Addie No Claire You re too young and too ungenerous You can t practise justice tempered with mercy

Addie struggles down the path The bag is too heavy for her She puts it down to rest herself looks back pleadingly at Robert and Edward They are watching her with e kind of frozen horror Automatically Robert moves to help her Claire's voice comes like e whiplash.

Claire. Robert! Stay where you ee

Addie turns picks up the bag and struggles past he gazebo offstage, right Rosie shakes her head, and begins to clear away the teacups. nervously rattling them As her fear takes over she begins to sing in the silence, nervously at first, then louder and louder

Rosie Sweet Adeline my Adeline...

At night, dear heart for you I pine

Your fair face beams, in all my dreams

You ra the flower of my heart sweet Adeline

Rosie exits, trundling the tea-trolley but in the inner room she still sings on in her harsh young voice Claire takes a deep angry breath and moves to the piano. She sits and opens the lid firmly, places her hands on the keys, but cannot play Silence falls. Claire swings round to face them.

Claire. (brightly) You can have a studio Robore We ll fix up Tommy s old dark room put e skylight in the roof You ll de able to do your best work here

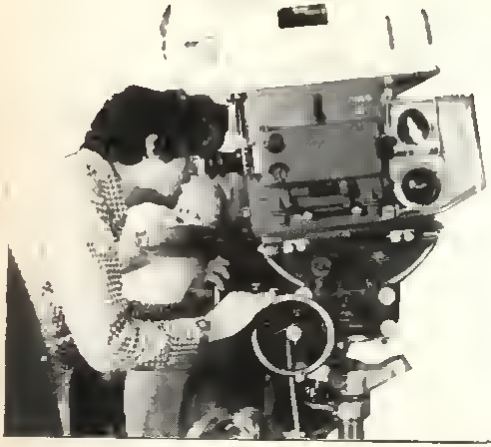
Long pause. Silence. Claire's voice runs on and on, more and more desperately

Claire We ll go on living my darlings We ll de happy it ll be as if it ell never happened We ll go on in this house as ll she d died and her memory will fede gradually people will forget about her and in e little while they won t even mention her to us ... anymore

Her voice dies into e whisper She swings back, and sits rem red backed to the audience Edward in his wing chair stares woodenly into the fire Robert stends stiffly in profile at the entrance to the loggia A fitful gleam of sunlight, entering the room, falls across Addie'e portrait It is a tableau for e family portrait circa 1915, with only the recording eye of the family photographer absent The clock strikes in the silent room The music of "Sweet Adeline" fleods over the soundtrack

FINAL CURTAIN

Film, television, radio



DON'S PARTY FROM PLAY TO FILM

by director BRUCE BERESFORD

Bruce Beresford at the camera (above), Graham Kennedy as Mack, and John Hargreaves as Don (below).

BRUCE BERESFORD was born in Sydney in 1940 and educated at Sydney University. He worked as a film editor in Nigeria before taking charge of the British Film Institute production board. He directed the two Barry McKenzie films and is currently working on *Getting of Wisdom* which is to be released in July 1977.

As a student, much influenced by all those " I was a writer of genius until the philistine moguls of Hollywood turned me onto the booze" novels, I remember arguing that any film which altered a single word of a play was committing sacrilege. Accordingly, I ravered a stodgily faithful Sidney Lumet version of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and an even more faithful and tedious, film of Lorraine Hanberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. At least the O Neill was filmed on location and looked moderately believable... even if it was far too verbose. *Raisin in the Sun* was shot almost entirely on a stage set and took no advantage whatever of the film maker's materials - atmospheric locales, the emotional effect of changes of camera angle, different lens sizes, and so on. In this way, it was a forerunner of the recent American Film Theatre series, which, by shooting in long takes on basically stage sets fail to compensate the audience for the loss of the physical presence of the actors by taking advantage of the emotional apparatus of the techniques of film.

It is no revelation that charismatic actors can turn a mediocre play into a success. In London recently I saw an indifferent Ben Travers farce, *Banana Ridge*, made quite amusing by Robert Morley's flawless timing. But a play is watched in one long "take". If filmed, *Banana Ridge* would have to be broken up into close ups, long shots etc so the perfection of the artist's timing would no longer be so apparent and, with his physical presence not actual, but photographed, all the stress would be thrown onto the quality of the dialogue and situations. In the case of *Banana Ridge* as with so many other plays, the result would be disastrous.

After being asked to direct a film of *Don's Party* in October 1975, and understandably not being to anxious to ruin such a popular play... I watched as many play to film adaptions as possible. I noted, with relief, that the most successful were pacey, filmed on solid looking sets or actual locations, and were neither so faithful to the original that they reproduced every word or so frivolous that they dissipated the very qualities that accounted for the success of the original, by emphasising "scenery"

instead of characters or by casting "names" instead of suitable actors. The film version of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is a good 'bad' example. Neither John Mills or Ernest Borgnine were acceptable as Australian cane-cutters and a naive attempt to "internationalise" the subject only drained it of its vitality.

Among the filmed plays I admired was a graceful and elegant version of Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, stylishly directed by the almost forgotten Alberto Lattuada. Not too much of the play was left (a good thing in this case), Though the basic premise and sense of it were left intact. On late night TV I saw two old farces, *Getting Gertie's Garter* and *Up in Annie's Room* – both directed by Alan Dwan. In this case, very little was changed from the original plays (either settings or dialogue) but Dwan directed at a breakneck pace which removed any staginess.

Of the more recent filmed plays I liked William Friedkin's version of Crowley's *Boys in the Band*. It was filmed on a vast set in a New York studio but enough money was spent, and talent applied, to make it look acceptably realistic. Not a great deal of the dialogue was altered from the original (the film ran two and a quarter hours) and Friedkin never went berserk with the camera (Richard Lester ruined *The Knack* by throwing out all the dialogue and filming it like a Coca Cola commercial) but never let it become too static either. Best of all, and most importantly, a superb cast played every part to perfection. Marcel Pagnol proved, when he filmed his magnificent trilogy *Fanny*, *Marius* and *Cesar*, in the early 1930's, that it is possible for the sets to be cardboard, the sound erratic, the editing basic, and the lighting dreary, yet truly magnificent acting (given the material) will create magic every time.

As soon as I received the *Don's Party* film script I compared it with the original play and was relieved to find that David Williamson was aware of the differences between the two mediums. He understood the capability of the cinema to convey nuances of behaviour and had cleverly reworked a number of dialogue encounters so that the overall length was substantially reduced but the content remained the same. The action was extended throughout the house, into the garden, a barbecue area, the next door Liberal voter's swimming pool and to the front street, where Don and his friends play football. I realised all of this would give a much greater sense of realism than a mere living room setting, and it was a major fact in our decision to shoot the whole film on location. Incidentally, the Petitt and Sevitt house we used to shoot the film sells for around $40,000, yet the quote I was given for rebuilding a section of it in a film studio was $80,000! And that's without plumbing or a ceiling.

David's film script was shot with very few changes, though two short scenes between Don and Kath were later removed in the editing. Excellent in themselves, they seemed only to repeat information we already had about these two characters. At the last minute just before the completed film was printed, I removed a thirty five second scene between Don and Mal which took place near the end of the movie. Again, the scene was fine by itself and was beautifully played by Ray Barrett and John Hargreaves but failed to add anything to their relationship.

I spent almost eight weeks casting the eleven roles in *Don's Party*, and finished up with remarkably few actors from the original Sydney or Melbourne stage productions. Some were unavailable during our shooting period, others were too old for the roles (more important on film than stage) and a couple I just couldn't fit into the production as I saw it. However, Pat Bishop, who was Kath in the play, is now Jenny Ray Barrett – Cooley in the London production.

is Mal and Veronica Lang actually repeats her London production role of Jody. The other actors are John Hargreaves (Don), Harold Hopkins (Cooley), Graham Kennedy (Mack), Graeme Blundell (Simon), Kit Taylor (Evan), and Clare Binney (Susan).

Because of the range of characters and variety of incident, *Don's Party* lends itself to a film much more than David Williamson's other plays, though I'm attracted to his new one, *A Handful of Friends*, because of the sheer complexity of the four characters' relationships.

I've seen few other Australian plays I wanted to film, though I was impressed earlier this year by Richard Wherrett's excellent production of Alex Buzo's *Martello Towers*. Apart from a fascinating group of characters it seemed to be one of those rare plays where the setting (an island) and the complicated entrances and exits of the cast would benefit from the realism and scope of the cinema.

Claire Binney, as Susan, in the swim — *Photo Double Head Prodns Ltd*

DON'S PAR

. . . THEN AN

GRAEME BLUNDELL directed the premiere production of *Don s Party* for the A P G and plays the role of Simon in the film. Graeme was a prime mover and chief apologist for an alternative theatre in Melbourne in the late sixties. He has acted with the M T C and is part of Hoople Productions which is mounting Alma de Groen s *Chifley* at Grant Street. He is best known for his little role in *Alvin Purple* on film and TV.

The first production of David Williamson's *Dons Party* at the Pram Factory in 1971, was something of an event for a number of reasons it was the second play by this playwright to be performed within a few months in Carlton *The Removalists* was running at La Mama at this time with Bruce Spence Peter Cummins and Williamson himself and the attention that was focused on these productions certainly helped launch that extraordinary and much envied successful career, it came at a time of critical importance to the A P G and helped anchor what had become an ambitious (and within the group controversial) strategy for survival the attempt to operate the Pram Factory as often as possible combining the efforts of various unpaid A.P G people with those of a professional core company of professionally paid actors and administrators

In April '71, the A P G received a grant of $5000 to establish a core company, which was to act as the central performance group and was also to provide administrative structure to enable the A P G to function with more efficiency The A P G had sustained itself over the previous three years through the hard work, and at times messianic devotion, of a core of unpaid performers and writers Throughout its history, (two years as the La Mama Company and a year and a half as the A P G) the Group had been plagued by the conflict between the demands of performance and innovation and those of organisation Organisational work had always been handled by unpaid helpers and by the performers themselves who had always been obliged to work fulltime in outside jobs in order to keep the Group s work going

The core group was called the **A.P G Portable Theatre**, and was an amalgam of ideas pinched from overseas groups like the Portable Theatre of young English writers Howard Brenton, David Hare and Snoo Wilson and the R.C A ' **Theatre-go round** -dedicated to offering a supply of drama wherever the demand might arise, and particularly committed to the idea of performing plays developed by resident writers working in symbiotic collaboration with actors and director The concept was similar to other English groups as well Ken Campbell's **Roadshow** from the Bolton Octagon, or London s **Cast** in its deval

The premiere Pram Factory production of Don s Party *in 1971 Directed by Graeme Blundell Showing John Smythe (Mack) in the duck-hunting sequence Photo Ian McKenzie*

NOW

opment of 'popular theatre' using familiar material to sell live theatre to audiences for whom the experience is unfamiliar, developing ideas of 'instant theatre' treatment of real events

However, through this period it became increasingly apparent to many of us that survival lay in the Pram Factory not really outside it The Portable Theatre had performed at a number of different venues factories, strike meetings, rock and roll concerts, the campus circuit, other theatres – and developed a variety of new original projects But there were only salaries for seven or eight people for ten weeks And the work has been less outward - directed than we had hoped and a lot of time was spent on projects at the Pram Factory during the same period Many of the ideas about the 'portableness' of our work stayed undeveloped and we started to focus in, more and more on the venue itself Could we keep a playhouse open from week to week on a staple diet of contemporary Australian plays? Could we develop a professional ensemble? Could we lead ourselves?

And it was precisely at this time that we found ourselves somewhat deserted by the press As the first major A P G report to the Australia Council for the Arts said

"In the first year or two of our existence (as the La Mama Company) we were hailed in rather extreme ways by critics and feature writers. The accounts of our work seldom matched its quality Our importance was, without a doubt exaggerated We were a group of writers, directors and actors which used a pocket playhouse ('the little hut' as Katharine Brisbane once referred to it in a review of a Syd Clayton event) as a showcase for the plays of writers who happened to be part of that loose circle of friends, acquaintances and dilettantes Nevertheless we had a 'high media visibility' the press with a peculiar dishonesty only it can understand gave us a go And our following increased because of it We didn't complain naturally about being over-indulged and over rated Then when we started to need all the help we could get when we took on a project and a playhouse infinitely more ambitious, more substantial, more significant than La Mama could ever be, at that moment our noteworthiness seemed to dim The press began to give us away It had exhausted all the angles It left us there with scarcely a paragraph, looking very lonely in the middle of an enormous $100 a week playing space, just as we started to face the real test that any theatre company in this country has to face survival"

The Portable Theatre shows generated little income The grant covered a mere ten weeks Following the great success of *Marvellous Melbourne* (the first show at the Pram Factory) Romeril's *Chicago Chicago* and The *Murder Plays (Christie in Love* by Howard Brenton and *Mrs Thally F* by Romeril both performed by the Portable Theatre people) were very poorly attended and while reviewed well, received almost no real press cover

Then came *Don's Party*, which generated the best audiences since *Marvellous Melbourne*, a lot of excited press coverage and the chance of survival *The Feet Of Daniel Mannix* (Barry Oakley) and *Betty Can Jump* (a collectively devised women's show) quickly followed A bigger more regular audience was established and suddenly there was the possibility of real subsidy (And more headaches, if that was possible!)

But *Don's Party* in many ways really got it going

However there had been a certain amount of hostility to doing it within the group It was not experimental enough, it didn't push back the frontiers of drama, and life it's political consciousness needed raising, it rehashed the idiom of the fifties rather than trying to raise drama out of its rut of irrelevance, it's Pinteresque sordidity was now a TV commodity and had no place in the theatre its women characters were contrived and poorly developed A comment by a Sydney reviewer about The Jane Street production later on probably summed it up "It's not the reminiscences of psychowrights we need, but people willing to explore new theatrical possibilities"

Some of us felt at the time that that was exactly what *Don's Party* represented for the A P G, new theatrical possibilities a chance to explore more naturalistic areas in performance the possibility of detailing a more psychologically elaborated, less shallow mode of acting than had been possible in the broader pieces like *Marvellous Melbourne* and *Chicago*

There was another argument against doing the play as well Though it had less to do with the nature and quality of the text than with the theatrical and interpersonal process at work within the group Some people were questioning the work orientation that was taking

Graeme Blundell and Bruce Beresford – directors respectively of play and film.

over the more laboratory/ensemble direction they wished the A P G to take It was felt that the survival strategy of getting shows on "getting the work together" was making the A P G workshop approach to texts suffer Rehearsals were becoming too mechanical, too little time was being devoted to the elaboration of texts Ideas were being developed in performance rather than rehearsal shortcomings in technique were being revealed there rather than in rehearsal where there was a chance of correcting them Output survival was taking the place of exploration and socio-political textural examination (My own feeling at the time was that the pressure of producing

Yvonne Melvin, John Smythe, Bruce Knappett and Wilfred Last in the original Don's Party

Photo Ian McKay

original work in a minimum of time under great pressure provided the means for trying out a vast array of different techniques and theatrical ideas and seeing, very quickly whether they worked with audiences. In this way you learn to trust hunches (and also learn how reliable your instinct is or more likely isn't) and more particularly as John Romeril pointed out in a *Bulletin* interview at the time, the worry was less whether people think you are delivering 'the goods' than with the making of forms and the creation of ideas that can be explored later at more leisure.)

However for all the concern, it was generally accepted that *Don's Party* was as good a play as any to do — if any scripted play had to be done.

It's potential accessibility for audiences — the marvellous caustic comedy, the instant gasp of idiomatic recognition - that since much marvelled at and remarked upon Williamson "gift for accurately catching and exploiting Australian speech rhythms", and his uncanny ability to deal "most forcefully, most colloquially and most unselfconsciously with contemporary social attitudes" — made it without doubt a very "commercial" play for the A.P.G. struggling at that time for survival, trying to develop audiences, trying to be full-time. It was also in line with what had been much of the stated policy of the Group over the years — the development of new writers and of a theatre not the result of the cultural cringe, Pommified and irrelevant or Yanked and wanked but instead carving 'its way through the tallow of current taste" and laying bare the bone so that "the real issues, the myths and mores of our society will then declare themselves and be examined. Only then will we hear our own tongue, not the mythico literary language concocted in the past — "a theatre speaking — directly to Australians of elemental problems in a living language."

It was decided to do it. But the attempt was made to solve some of the group felt problems in rehearsal. In fact in many ways the production was more a workshop try-out for an extraordinarily commercial play than a punt at the 'the ideal show'. The first weeks of rehearsal were mainly exploratory, researching character background and filling in the subtext and seeing if we could reproduce the precision of Williamson's colloquial speech rhythms with the same warts and all accuracy. Time was also spent attempting to fill out the women's roles as it was generally felt on the readings that they were somewhat one dimensional and unconvincing either as types or real individuals. We used a variety of improvisational exercises and techniques to overcome the very bitter, cinematic style of the first draft - to try to develop an understanding of the individuals at the party, and the nature of their inter-relationships, and on translating that into theatrical action within rhythms and flow of a real party. As Williamson noted in his programme note, the fascination for director and cast lay in solving the problems of focus, as most characters are on stage for the duration of the play, and in the selection of the various interactions between characters — and the accuracy of the recreation". It was, in fact, a formidable technical exercise. It was performed almost in the round, with the audience sitting in the main room with the actors. As there was no real 'off stage', conversations had to be maintained till it was an individual or couple's turn to move into focus again. This meant constant improvised dialogue which could be overheard by sections of the audience until your turn came to heighten the moment as it were. And this 'picking up of the cue' had to happen smoothly and with total credibility.

The same sort of discipline was required from the performers in the movie version, and within the limitations of time. Bruce Beresford tried similar techniques to make the action credible and convincing. Like the Pram Factory production Beresford and producer Phillip Adams were after 'a very naturalistic, almost Czechoslovakian' style. They were somewhat desperate, and for good reason, to get away from the heighted theatricality of *The Removalists* movie — not so much in performance as in appearance.

Though Adams did talk to the cast at one stage about improvisation and Robert Altman, who at that time was his hero, getting it in one take, going with the action full sound cover, that loose, laid-back acting style, with performers contributing moments from their own experience as well as interpreting some one else's.

There was a week's rehearsal. Much of it was required, not to polish the acting as such, but to detail and pattern the shooting script and lighting plot. As Beresford (and Director of Photography, Don McAlpine) wanted to make it look like a film not a play, they felt that a "real" location, not a set was required, with lengthy and involved tracking though that house and sharp shots through windows, doorways and gardens detailing the action across a long depth of field. There was obviously a major problem with this — the problem of continuity of lighting' it was of obvious importance, with the sort of complicated and extravagent tracking shots that were being contemplated, that the camera crew didn't track through the lighting sources. So the rehearsal period was used mainly to see where dialogue lines and movement sequences would fall in terms of shots, angles and lighting set-ups. And because it was an actual house, it was possible for the actors to move through it as they would in character, and build the shots around their natural and felt movements. (It usually works the other way — they push you into the most unnatural and convoluted positions, make you cheat the eye line, keep the laval up for the mike, react to another performer who is not there (for close ups) because the production company can't afford the extra days rate - and expect you to be real.) It also meant that when shooting started the whole film was plotted, with each camera angle worked out.

It also gave us a lot of time to play with the characters and of course get to know the other actors. It's always a pretty alienating experience arriving on a film set to work with people you don't know and being expected, with a minimum of rehearsal, to make the most complex interpersonal relationships look credible. And the getting-to-know period was most important for this film version because it was conceived very much in an ensemble way - the sort of film where actors would feed off the text and each other and the crew, anything that developed and looked right could be worked in. This creates a very free atmosphere for actors particularly on a film set and the chance for much greater creativity than is usually allowed. Actors are the lowest common denominator in the whole industrial equation, the most dispensible, and are often regarded at best as 'the talent'. But Beresford and McAlpine were superb actors-people: tolerant, aware, totally focused and concentrated on the minutiae of the performance as well as the broad strokes. They nursed people through difficult scenes, cajoled performances when necessary, went with great good nature with the improvisational breaks (John Hargeaves for instance attempted to find out about playing drunk for the big scene with Mal and Don at the end of the play, by drinking about fifteen heavy vodkas during a rehearsal lunch break. It was a serious, studied experiment. You couldn't understand a word he said, but it entertained the whole unit for the day and proved a few points about method and madness.)

There were problems though. Shooting in the real house for six weeks created many technical problems, particularly as it rained for most of the time. Also personal problems. Phillip Adams was keen on the real house because 'a drama like *Don's Party*, concerning a seething hotbed of interpersonal conflicts, requires a high degree of claustrophobia. It's like a domestic argument - if you step outside into the garden the issues seem less important. The problem was that the real claustrophobia (and the ensemble like pressure) created a hot bed of interpersonal tensions in the cast and at times the conflicts and antagonisms involved the movements of the play.

Wilfred Last, Bruce Knappett, John Smythe and Kerry Dwyer

JIM SHARMAN DIRECTORS

The original idea was that I (R C) would interview old friend (J S) for the magazine. Neither of us likes being interviewed but Jim thought this might be a relatively painless one and I needed money. Then it was suggested we convert it to a sort of dialogue, have our photo taken together, and fit ourselves into a projected series in the magazine. The result is neither one thing nor the other. I made random instrusions in a conversation that constantly veered from the topic. As typed up from notes I made, the conversation gives a broad general view of Jim's work and attitudes, against a background of my struggles with the practical and ethical difficulties of contributing to a conversation and recording it at the same time.

RETROSPECTIVES.

J S. Looking back I see clear divisions. Finding my way in the '60s, after N I D A, I got together productions of published plays like *Chips with Everything*, and *The Birthday Party*, and *A Taste of Honey*, as well as working on new texts and forms as in *On Stage Oz and Terror Australis*. That was the first division. Then I worked for a year for the Australian Opera as an assistant director before being given a production of *Don Giovanni*. That led to the second division — the musicals *Hair* and *Superstar* — which took me to London. Also in that division were the first films — *Arcade* (which no-one will ever see) and *Shirley Thompson Versus the Aliens* (which I've just revised — by cutting half an hour), and a couple of plays — *As You Like It* and *Lasaster*. The third division was London where I did two Sam Shepard plays — *The Unseen Hand* and *The Tooth of Crime* — and *The Rocky Horror Show*. That led into the fourth division — the film of *Rocky* and *Summer of Secrets*, back in Australia — it will be released at Christmas. And last, almost a fifth division, *The Season at Sarsaparilla*.

We talked a bit about our joint retrospective: we first met at N F D A. — Jim had graduated the year before I started and he was taking some classes at N I D A, himself — he introduced me to the mysteries of the tape-recorder — an article we could have used to some advantage right now. I worked with him on a student exercise related to A Doll's House. We both remembered with affection Robin Lovejoy's lectures on directing — the only time, in our experience, when anyone even tried to talk about the subject. We both began, after leaving N I D A, with productions whose casts were ex N I D A students. There we diverged — my main line of development being in the direction of close work with a small group, leading to the formation of Performance Syndicate and productions like Orestes and The Tempest. Our heroes at the time, roseate with distance, were representatively different — Jim's being Joan Littlewood and Peter Brook, mine being Grotowski and traditional Eastern theatres. Perhaps my chief, thematic interest has been in Jacobean theatre, from my graduation production of The Broken Heart, through The Revenger's Tragedy, The Dutch Courtesan, Measure for Measure, Pericles, to, most recently, The Duchess of Malfi. My interest in these plays ran side by side with my interest in actors and ensemble work and reached perhaps its happiest expression in The Tempest. Other work concentrated on experiments with form — Ten Thousand Miles Away, Muriel Mariner — and, throughout, the involvement of music and musicians has been important.

WORKING METHODS AND IDEALS

J S. Right from the beginning, my first response, my main preoccupation has been with the visual aspects of theatre. I began by designing my own productions, then when I realised that, by not having specialised in that area, I had limitations of technical knowledge, I began to look for designers who would listen to me in detail, follow my ideas, and then take them further.

R C. I've never got out of the habit of designing my own productions — I've always felt that the play, where it's placed, and the way the actors look are quite inseparable and that I'm too insultingly precise about it all to give a designer any creative freedom.

J S. One of the things we have in common is a concern for the 'totality', the through line of a production. It can be achieved with a designer like Wendy Dickson, but it's a delicate balance. You need someone who will listen, but not someone who simply says yes and carries out what you've described — it's a complex and detailed relationship. In this area my happiest collaboration was with Brian Thomson who worked more as a stage architect than as a traditional designer.

R C. I probably wanted to make 'working methods' a topic because I have clear ideas about the sort of work I've always wanted to do: long preparation with a group committed to one another and the material they're working on. I've nearly had it in the past, but I don't think it will happen again now. In fact I have to learn to deal with the status quo — cast assembled for one play, four weeks' rehearsal, opening night the only goal. But you don't have a problem in this area.

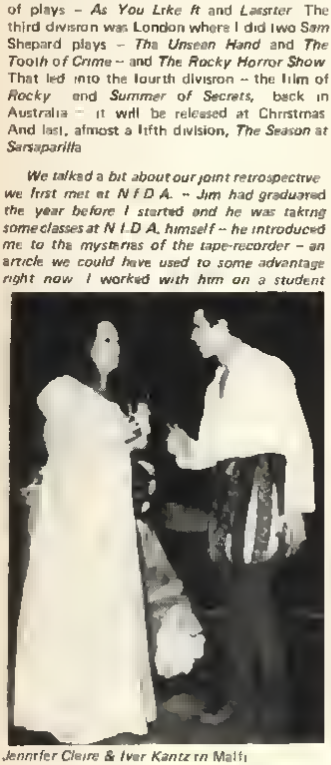
J S. No. A permanent company isn't important to me. A production, for me, now is something that slowly comes together in my mind. I'd been thinking about *Sarsaparilla* for more than a year — and when I'm ready I simply need an entrepreneurial situation that will allow me to realise it effectively. I still have to make my own opportunities — we both have, all along.

You certainly need more energy and determination to set up a production here than you do in, say, London. And certainly there is nowhere here among the subsidised theatres, that you could interest in the sorts of plays that the Royal Court would cheerfully tackle — plays, like those of Bond, of obvious merit but no immediate commercial appeal. Australian theatres, despite subsidy, still feel commercial responsibilities — the right to fail isn't built into the philosophy of any theatre here.

R C. I'm bound to point out that my production of *The Duchess of Malfi* would satisfy most definitions of commercial failure and that the artistic directors of Nimrod were unfairlingly supportive and enthusiastic in the midst of commercial disaster. I remember, in years gone by, that you used to defend commercial viability and felt the need to reach a mass audience. Do you still?

J S. Since then I've had the experience of productions like *Unseen Hand*, which I think of as perhaps my best work to date — and it played for six weeks Upstairs at the Court, a theatre seating sixty people. The theatre that I was interested in in the '60s — 'celebratory' theatre, the theatre of rock and roll, of popular culture, of revolt against '50's naturalism (the careers and sex lives of the middle classes, endlessly discussed in rooms) — all that came to a conclusion, for me, with *Tooth of Crime*. I saw it as the play in which the '60's finally had to confront the '70's. After that I thought 'I've said what I've got to say about all that'. It's not that the '70's have seen a return to naturalism but rather a re-discovery of the content, of the writer's contribution, and of the importance of people as opposed to concepts.

R C. The question of working method is bound up with it. In confronting *Duchess of Malfi* with a cast assembled for the purpose, many of them people I'd never worked with before, and a four week rehearsal period, I felt as if all the things I'd worked for, all the ideals I'd built up through the '60's, had been stripped away. It felt like coming face to face with the sort of working situation I'd been avoiding all along. Although, in the end, some reactions to *Duchess* re-assured me that the working experience of the '60's had not simply vanished — that the production achieved its style as a result of the work that had preceded it — still, I have the feeling that, to some extent, what was tried for in the '60's has been given up for lost in the '70's.



Jennifer Claire & Ivar Kantz in Malfi
Photo: Willy Young

Photo: Willy Young

REX CRAMPHORN DIALOGUE

J.S When Peter Brook returned from taking his company through Africa his conclusion was theatre is no more than people telling a story to other people, but that the conclusion could only be validated by the process of arriving at it

RECENT EXPERIENCES, THE STATUS QUO, AND WHAT MIGHT BE DONE:

We had already overlapped into the next topic, which was supposed to be about how our most recent experiences related to our ideals. Jim talked a little about coming back, after two years away from theatre, to work on Sarsaparilla *for the Tote*

J.S I'm reasonably confident now, about my ability to deal with the sorts of problems that come up when you arrive as an outsider to work in an institutionalised theatre But I'm aware of how difficult it must be for a young inexperienced or in any way insecure director to face a situation where saying 'I don't know' or 'not yet' can cause a crisis in the administration or the technical departments and cost the director their respect In such a situation all kinds of wrong decisions can be made just to avoid seeming slow, fuzzy or indecisive

Earlier this year, as a kind of intellectual exercise, with no particular concern for practicability, Jim and I worked out a season of plays that we'd like to do – Brecht Bond Shepard and so on – together with the production requirements of such a season When I asked him what thoughts he had about improving the status quo theatre in which he works, his suggestions reminded me of what we had talked of earlier in the year

J.S. First, there could be more long term vision in all departments. Organizations like the Tote or the M.T.C with several theatres at their disposal, could have well-defined artistic policies for each theatre The plays could be organized in seasons with season themes (like the Tote's recent American season) and a company assembled for the whole season Then, if, say, it were a Brecht season the actors could have some preparatory work on the whole general area and then a series of directors could each deal with a different play in a different way Any coherent system even something like a star system with plays chosen in relation to available talent would be better than lacking about trying to find which way the wind is blowing The sort of theatre that Sydney, in particular, would support would be one like Joe Papp's New York Public Theatre – Shakespeare hits Broadway – a combination of committment and flashiness.

DIRECTING, AT HOME AND ABROAD:

The conversation turned towards several allied topics – what Jim thought about working in Australia as opposed to overseas what coming back to work after an absence was like what differences he saw in his role as a director here and abroad

J.S Working at the Royal Court was probably the most enjoyable experience of my life I would always take an opportunity to work in another country The most important part of working overseas is the sense of distance and perspective In London I worked on American plays Even *Rocky* was related to America and American films Coming back to Australia is coming back to something more detailed and direct Particularly coming back to do *Sarsaparilla*, a play whose background is very much my own background In preparing for it I became very involved in the rest of Patrick White's writing and the new projects that I have in mind at the moment (Patrick White's screenplay, *The Night, the Prowler* and another screenplay about the quality of life in Sydney) are closely associated with my own experience of growing up in Sydney I also have the impression that Australian audiences see theatre in terms of life, they are more susceptible, in a way – European audiences see theatre in terms of theatre I am beginning to see the role of the director as a more actively creative one than I had imagined – I see in it the possibility of re-evaluating reality, as a painter does, showing it to an audience so that it can never again be passed over or ignored The awareness, the detail for that sort of work can only come in an environment you have known from childhood

THE ROLE OF THE CRITIC:

J.S It the artist re-evaluates reality, the first task of the critic is to understand this re-evaluation and, in his own terms, to mediate between it and its audience – to further reveal even to explain the work Critics who plough straight in to value judgements have missed the most important part of their job A good example is the reviews you had for *Duchess* most of them only wanted to say 'Why bother to do this play?' and leave it at that But that's such a general problem – why bother to get up in the morning? Their job was actually to discover for themselves through open minded experience of the production why you had bothered to do that play and then to share it with their readers Here's a terrific quote from Martin Esslin's piece on Harold Hobson (Sept *Plays and Players*)

"For the critic while a guide and teacher of the audience is also, from the performer's point of view, the representative spokesman of the public Applause, after all, may be an indication of audience reaction but it is a singularly inarticulate one Having slaved for weeks, or months over a performance the actors, writer, director are immensely eager to find out whether what they intended to do actually achieved its objective That is why the early editions are snatched from the news vendors of Broadway at four o clock in the morning A competent critic however unfavourable his verdict, is of immense value to the performer and the writer On the other hand, the active practitioners of the stage can instantly recognize the incompetent critic in his praise as well as in his condemnation when he attributes faults of the writer to the actor and vice versa or displays ignorance of the actual process of production A critic who is recognised as knowledgeable can help performers immensely"

FILM AND THEATRE:

We hadn't talked much about film, but, finally, what came out about it gave a shape to the whole conversation, rounding out Jim's retrospective and his perception of his work

J.S. I suppose in the 60's I saw myself as working in the theatre and taking time off, when I had something particular and different to express to work in film Now I see myself as working in film and taking time off, when I need to to do something that can only be done in theatre The difference between them is what is interesting theatre, for me, is people talking to people, film is a progression of images

R.C At the beginning you said that your preoccupation in theatre was with visual aspects It seems as though film satisfies this preoccupation more effectively than theatre could and that the transference of interest from this aspect has allowed others the content the human level to come into focus It also seems as though many of the other things that we have talked about – your experience at the Royal Court your interest in Patrick White's writing your return home – have contributed to the development of this new area of attention, and that the whole impulse has found its expression in the production of *Sarsaparilla*

Bill Hunter Max Cullen & Kate Fitzpatrick in Sarsaparilla *Photo Robert McFarlane*

Doris Fitton O B E.

WOMEN IN AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

Neva Carr-Glyn

PART TWO

Marlis Thiersch

MARLIS THIERSCH lectures on Australian drama and theatre at the School of Drama University of New South Wales is Honorary Secretary of the Australian Centre of the International Theatre Institute and was awarded her doctorate for a thesis on the development of indigenous playwrighting She apologises for inaccuracies and omissions and would enthusiastically welcome additional information

"Ah, the women!" sighs Girlie Pogson in Patrick White's play *The Season at Sarsaparilla* 'It never pays to be a woman " But after first participating in the Australian theatre mainly as actresses and singers woman are now earning their living in it in many roles

Continuing the account of women dedicated to careers in the theatre what one male director calls the Matriarchy of Australian Theatre

From the 1930s onwards women were outstanding as directors in the repertory or 'little' theatre movements Among them were Rona Feldgate and Babette Stevens in Brisbane, and Doris Fitton D B E at the Independent Theatre in Sydney, Irena Mitchell M.B.E at the St Martin's Theatre in Melbourne Joan Whalley at the Twelfth Night Theatre, Jennifer Blocksidge at La Boite, both in Brisbane, Miriam Hampson at Sydney's New Theatre, and Colleen Clifford Joan Pope and Jean Marshall in various States continue to run their own shows, sometimes as authors and producers like Amy McGrath at the Australian Theatre in Sydney and Betty Quinn at Adelaide's Q Theatre both dedicated to the works of indigenous playwrights.

In the 1940s May Hollinworth ran the Metropolitan Theatre in Sydney and Betty Bryant directed Bryant's Playhouse Kathleen Robinson s activities at the Minerva Theatre are commemorated in an annual series of lectures at Sydney University on aspects of theatre

Jean Wilhelm, who came to the School of Drama at the University of N S W from the U S A nine years ago, has been active in directing operas and straight plays such as the Old Tote's production of *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* by Dorothy Hewett Sandra Mackenzie has composed music for plays, directed musicians in shows, is a highly developed stage manager and on occasion has directed actors and the action as in *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* for Harry M Miller Christine Dunstan has contributed to theatre as a freelance stage director and Lorraine Archibald looks after the Flinders Theatre in South Australia

The Rayner sisters, Joan and Betty have long benefitted young people as writers directors and performers in Australia's longest running theatre for children, touring all States Another pair of sisters Beatrice and the late Evelyn Tildesley, have aided theatrical enterprise through their work for the British Drama League with its extensive library and have by their constant support encouraged the growth of Australian theatre in many important ways

Among the doyennes of women stage performers are Queenie Ashton, Winifred Green, Enid Lorimer, Ethel Gabriel Aileen Britton and Bettina Welsh, and present-day Australian actresses are many and talented Some names may exemplify the variety of accomplishment in the 'live' theatre Gloria Dawn Patricia Kennedy, Ruth Cracknell and Bunney Brooke have deserved love and respect on stage in memorable roles and Betty Lucas Joan Bruce Elizabeth Kirkby, Irene Inescort, Daphne Gray, Jackie Kott, Dinah Shearing,

Kate Fitzpatrick The Legend of King O Malley *Photo A E T T,*

Patricia Conolly Nita Pannell, Doreen Warbuton, Beverley Dunn, Fay Kelton, Elspeth Ballantyne, Anne Haddy, Lyndell Rowe June Collis Maggie Miller Judy Dick Carole Skinner, Kate Fitzpatrick, Jane Harders, Barbara West, Helen Morse, Jennifer Claire, Julie Hamilton, Jacki Weaver, Robyn Nevin Anna Volska, Juda Kuring and Evelyn Krape are some of the many other talented performers who continue to instruct and delight their public in all States

It is, after all, audiences who make 'theatre' and more than half of all play-goers in Australia are women, as are taxpayers whose patronage enables theatre to stay live, energetic, innovative and effective, thanks to constant public assistance to the performing arts

Since Melba s success, Australia has had more than a handful of world renowned singers Florence Austral, Gertrude Johnson, Strella Wilson Sylvia Fisher Elsie Morrison, Maria Collier and Joan Hammond were among the splendid voices before Joan Sutherland came on the scene, winning the Sun Aria Contest and the Mobil Quest and in 1961 going to England to win fame abroad and an immensely enthusiastic following back home

Jill Perryman started singing in musicals such as *Paint Your Wagon* in 1955, then starring in *Funny Girl* in the sixties and in *A Little Night Music* in 1973 Nancy Hayes played in musical comedies such as *Pippin* and *Irene* as well as taking the lead in *Sweet Charity* and acting in more recent plays June Bronhill, the girl from Broken Hill, has changed from operetta to the Australian opera to the delight of audiences, and Margaret Roadknight of folk fame and Jeannie Lewis the blues singer are with Robyn Archer among today's popular musical entertainers in the alternative theatre

The dancing ladies of the Australian stage include Laurel Martyn, Elizabeth Dalman Margaret Barr, Peggy Segar Margaret Walker, Lucette Aldous, Kathleen Gorham and Marilyn Jones, plus Dame Peggy van Praagh who came here from overseas

Women designers in the Australian theatre are fewer, but Desmonde Downing, Wendy Dickson and Anne Fraser have created many eye-catching stage sets

More recently, women have also taken leading roles as theatre administrators Lilian Horler has very efficiently managed the operations of the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney, from packing audiences into the old warehouse

to organising the more sophisticated doings at the new factory before being appointed Arts Administrator for the Paddington Town Hall Diana Sharpe still administers the Australian Theatre for Young People, as well as acting as Programme Manager for the Old Tote Theatre Company, for which Judy Clifford directs publicity Elizabeth Butcher is the busy Bursar for the National Institute of Dramatic Art, and Carmel Dunn has aided the cause of Australian playwrighting by conducting the Playreading Programme for the Melbourne Theatre Company

As Chief Executive Officer for the Australia Council, Jean Battersby has greatly influenced the flowering of theatrical activities of all kinds and has been instrumental in employing women as administrators Felicity Abraham, Donna Greaves, Margaret Wallace and Antigone Kefala, to mention a few Ailsa Carpenter, who used to work for the Independent Theatre, now organises the Drama Critics Awards for the Australia Council

Lots of ladies are active in young theatre Christine Westwood develops the Youth Theatre Programme for the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, Carol Woodrow is the Artistic Director of Canberra Children's Theatre Niomi Marks directs the Children's Arena Theatre in Melbourne Mary Fairbrother the Troika Theatre-in-Education team in Adelaide, and Barbara Menning is the Director of the Tasmanian T I E team Anne Godfrey-Smith, formerly a director of the Canberra Repertory Theatre, is now national consultant for the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association and Margaret Leask is national co-ordinator of the A Y P A A , which is affiliated with the international association of theatre for young people, ASSITEJ

Margaret Leask has for three years edited the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's quarterly magazine *Trust News*, and she currently acts as Administrator for the Australian National Playwrights Conference, a job held by Carole Long before her Angela Wales who is also involved in the Conference, edits the Trust's present *Theatrescope*, and Lucy Wagner is one of three editors for the promising new national monthly magazine *Theatre Australia*

Before joining the production staff of the South Australian Film Corporation, Lesley Hammond was the Administrator of the Marionette Theatre of Australia and Anne Taylor is one of the Federal Government's full time Film Censors In the cinema world, Sylvia Lawson is the foremost female film critic and Joan Long is well know for her film scripts *Caddie* being so far the latest Joan has just written ' A historical survey of women in Australian film production" in two parts (*Cinema Papers*, Jun/Jul Sep/Oct 1976) which outlines the activities of eighteen other fascinating female filmmakers, and Margaret Fink, *The Removalists*, and Pat Lovell, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* are prominent producers, with Jillian Armstrong becoming known as a young film director

In the media field, an ever increasing number of women are successful in drama activities, among them radio producer Julie Anne Ford, television editor Judy Colquhoun script editor and agent Moie Wood script adaptor Joy Hollyer, and stage playwrights Barbara Vernon and Marien Dreyer as writers and editors, to mention just a few

Grace Gibson for many years headed her own production company for radio plays, and Gloria Paton, Hilary Linstead, June Cann and Faith Martin successfully work today as theatrical agents Helen Montagu, now joint managing director of the important West End firm of H M Tennent, originally came from Australia and has also held the post of Administrator at London's famous Royal Court Theatre until 1974 In Perth, Edna Edgley was a vaudeville singer before her marriage to impresario Mick Edgley whom she survives and herself now directs the biggest entrepreneurial business in Australia

For a number of years, Margery Morgan edited the quarterly journal *Komos* from Monash University and since the war, several other women academics have contributed learned studies to the Australian Theatre The late Eunice Hanger for many years advanced the cause of indigenous drama as writer, editor and critic at Queensland University, where now Alrene Sykes lectures on Australian drama and writes and edits scholarly studies on the subject It was she who first discovered the *Doll* In the competition arranged by the Playwrights Advisory Board in 1954 Before her death in 1969 Helen Oppenheim of the School of Drama, University of N S W , wrote a series of journal articles and an unpublished but extremely well researched and comprehensive study of the early colonial drama in Australia Today Margaret Williams of the same School lectures on Australian drama and theatre and has also published several articles and a fine dissertation in this field She has two other such literary projects awaiting publication as well as being editor of one of the Currency Methuen 'National Theatre' series of Australian playscripts Helen van der Poorten, now at Newcastle University, has edited the major entries on Australian theatre in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, as well as preparing an edition in the Currency series of playtexts and acting as Convener of the Play selection Committee of the Playwrights Conference

For many years now, a number of women have filled the role of theatre critic in newspapers around the country thereby wielding considerable influence over theatrical events Among them are Mary Armitage in Adelaide, Donna Sadka and Margo Luke in Perth and Geraldine Pascall, Margaret Jones Frances Kelly and Romola Costantino in Sydney Outstanding on the critical scene is Katharine Brisbane, whose national theatre reviews and 'think pieces' about the state of Australian theatre have had a most nourishing influence on the 'new wave' playwrighting at a very important time in its development, between 1967 - 74 For seven years before that she had worked as drama critic on the *West Australian* From 1970 onwards she has further sustained her cultivating role by publishing, with her husband Philip Parsons, a series of Australian playtexts forty plays in handsome volumes to date The Currency Press has made these carefully edited texts available, now and forever, for production and for study By their public-spirited enterprise they have veritably created "a surviving record of our drama and, hence, our culture" - in the words of Anne Summers in the *National Times* (Oct 18-23 1976)

In her recent book, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Penguin 1975), Anne Summers discusses the image of women as it is mirrored in ' the organized body of expression called 'the Arts'." She has perceptively analysed the roles of women characters in a dozen Australian plays and has thus herself contributed significantly to the impact of Australian drama on the wider reading public From an interview she quotes Dorothy Hewett, the creator of Sally Banner in *The Chapel Perilous*

> What I think I succeed in is writing some big roles for women Well, we have to know how women think - and that's what I'm trying to get across on stage

NOTES For information in this compilation I am much indebted to kind friends and to the following books -

Brian Carroll *Australian Stage Album* (Macmillan 1976)

Jennifer Compton *Crossfire* (Currency Methuen 1976)

Edward Geoghegan *The Currency Lass*, ed Roger Covell (Currency 1976)

Leslie Rees *The Making of Australian Drama* (Angus & Robertson 1973)

Anne Summers *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Penguin 1975)

Dorothy Hewett *The Chapel Perilous* (Currency Press 1972)

Joan Long 'A historical survey of women in Australian film production' in two parts, *Cinema Papers* (Jun/Jul, Sep/Oct 1976)

Madge Ryan, June Jago, Ken Warren & Ray Lawler in the A E T T Doll 1956 7 *Photo A E T-I*

Ken Warren, Ray Lawler, June Jago, Madge Ryan and Ethel Gabriel in the M T C's original production of The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll *Photo M T C*

ANOTHER ....ANOTH

Stan Marks

Ray's at the library finishing *Other Times*. Why not 'phone him after 11 tonight he should be in "

Jacqueline Lawler a former actress sounded apologetic, though, heavens knows she shouldn t have been

It was as though the years had rolled back from October 1976, more than twenty years ago when Ray Lawler was a young men writing *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* exactly the same way as he was writing the third play in what has become known as *The Doll* trilogy at the Melbourne Public Library

It was somehow ironic and some sort of commentary on 1976 life I wondered whether anyone would ask Ray a similar question as when he had been writing *The Doll*

'Been reading a play?" someone who knew he was keen on the theatre asked

'No , replied Ray Lawler in his usual modest, but very definite manner "writing one "

I rang Ray Lawler at 11 p m He sounded a little tired but still his pleasant always ready to assist self

'Sorry to bother you Ray

"You're not bothering me!"

'Had a busy day?"

'Very Time is important "

How come you re writing in the public Library?

'Why not? I wrote *The Doll* there I prefer to work there it's as simple as that There is a peaceful atmosphere good for writing and thinking '

Does it have to be an Australian library and not an Irish or another overseas one? Ray repeated that after all he was Australian with a feeling for the country and people

I wondered how many at the library that particular day knew that a historical event was happening near them the third play in a trilogy that would make Australian, and, I gather, in many ways world theatrical history

The three plays of *The Doll* trilogy will be staged separately (see panel) in chronological order including successively on the Saturday beginning in the morning going after lunch and in the evening

It is believed that this is a world record for the same set of characters The only real equivalents are the British production of *The War of the Roses* and an American *Texas* trilogy During the twelve hour Melbourne Theatre Company production the audience will see the characters change from young folk to middle aged couples with their dreams spent and their lives almost pathetic shadows of their earlier years

The main characters are the two itinerant cane-cutters Roo and Barney and the girls who share their summers with them The plays are really a confrontation of the Australian out back with the life of the city An Australian trilogy which is still highly pertinent these days

Kid Stakes takes us back to the loursome s first mad summer spree when the ritual begins of giving Olive a kewpie doll to mark their continuing friendship

Perhaps the whole idea is best summed up in Olive s line I swear they're all the kids I'll ever need "

The middle play raises disturbing questions about the arrangement In *The Doll* everything falls to pieces Roo and Barney due to advancing age and general circumstances are forced to face up to realities Their illusions are shattered

In *Kid Stakes* Nance appears, illustrating the uncertainty of relationships The play is really the summer of the first doll s clock turned back

Says Ray Lawler of the trilogy It is a most personal statement

He sees *Other Times* as a "crossroads play ' the end of the war and a chance to go in a specific direction take a road and choose a particular course

Lawler says he wrote the original *Doll* in an effort to express something wholly private about Australia

Noted British writer critic man of the theatre Kenneth Tynan, described it as the declaration of Australian playwriting independence "

The London *Observer* said of it By accident, an Australian is doing for Australian characters what a Synge did for the Irish and Tennessee Williams did for the Deep South Lawler can stand for a whole rising generation which unlike its predecessor, has no instinctive respect for England, no longer thinks of

SUMMER
ER DOLL

STAN MARKS currently works in public relations. He has worked on newspapers notably the Herald both here and overseas. Many of his books for children have been published. Just out is his latest *Kettut Lives in Bali*

itself as English and prefers the look of Australia's future to that of anywhere else"

(It is interesting to speculate how far we have moved since that was written and what could be said now.)

The same cast will play the main characters in the *Doll* trilogy, Peter Curtein is Roo, Bruce Myles Barney, Sandy Gore Nancy and Carole Skinner Olive. David Downer and Irene Inescort have the other roles.

Designer is Anne Fraser and Director John Sumner who directed the original *Doll* and even in the late 1950s discussed a sequel to it with Lawler — even to open Melbourne new Arts Centre. (Another trilogy can be written for this event!)

Arrangements have been made with the National Film Library for a variety of period films capturing the various eras depicted in the plays to be sent to Melbourne for study. They will help with capturing the authentic atmosphere of the times. Nothing is being spared to ensure success.

Bruce Miles, one of Australia's best known actors, describes the trilogy as really Australian folk tales which will become an established part of our national literature.

"You know, there really are still many Barneys and Roos around today, and the plays are in no way dated," he says. "Indeed, they are as topical as ever and have a feeling of universal time and place. They are not only a slice of Australian life but part of Australia's theatre heritage."

Bruce made no secret of the difficulties in ensuring that the ways of the characters altered during the three plays.

"After all, we do age over twenty years and this is quite a challenge, especially during successive performances during the one day," he adds. "You know, it will take quite a deal of stamina on the part for the characters."

They all are ensuring they keep fit for the demanding roles. They may not jog but they certainly do other things to make certain they are in good health.

As well as excellent acting performances, the audiences will see examples of sheer stamina — something few will consider.

"We are fascinated at the thought of being on the stage for such a long time, with only lunch and dinner breaks, in different plays although they do carry through," says Bruce. "It's not going to be easy not to want to slip into a younger characterisation when an older one is called for and vice versa. The trilogy certainly has many challenges, exciting ones at that."

And, in between, the able cast is also rehearsing for a prior play at the M.T.C.

Bruce summed up the overall approach to the trilogy by explaining, "We really have to block out each play and almost isolate ourselves. Just think of the various little and big things we face in the progressive march of time during the three plays."

Bruce says Ray Lawler in the trilogy shows an instinctive feeling for simple working class folk and an amazing ear for speech.

Others I spoke to described Lawler as probably our best writer in capturing Australia's early lack of sophistication and writing about things which were well ahead of their time.

Olive, in some ways, was a women's libber in days when it wasn't fashionable to be one.

The cast feel that, as with *The Doll*, the complete trilogy could be a success overseas, especially in the U.K.

And what now for Ray Lawler?

No, there certainly won't be a fourth play in *The Doll* series. He hasn't made up his mind whether he will remain in Australia and continue as an advisor, director and producer with the M.T.C. or return to Ireland which has been his home for some years.

"It is exciting in Australia and things are certainly happening," he says. "I'd like, in many ways, to stay and be a sounding board for potential playwrights, exchange ideas and be a catalyst.

"I do love Ireland and feel the tug of the land and my Irish forebears. It's like Australia in so many ways. I don't know what will happen."

Only time will tell what he will decide but Australia could really benefit from this all round man of the theatre, who feels that the Australian theatre is in a much better shape than when he left in the 1960s.

But he insists that if our theatre is to succeed and prosper as it should it certainly needs government assistance — as does theatre everywhere.

Lawler said he thinks he has the feeling for the playwright in Australia. He finds current Australian plays slightly depressing because Australia is still looking for an identity. Playwrights are asking questions rather than supplying the answers. This was probably a passing phase. But, he knows the talent is here on all levels.

Although, he personally received around $12 000 for the film rights of *The Doll* he has never seen the movie, nor does he want to.

About the play of *The Doll* on Broadway, which only lasted a short time, he says: "Americans hadn't the faintest idea what we were talking about. It was played in a broad Australian accent and it never got on the American wavelength."

A pity, because *The Doll* typifies a whole era of Australian theatre and tells one a great deal about the man Ray Lawler, whose needs are simple and is one of the humblest people I have ever met.

Perhaps a real insight into Ray Lawler the man, and maybe his writings, is in something he

Bruce Myles and Sandy Gore in Kid Stakes
Photo: David Parker

once said to me about being a slave of possessions and always wanting more and more things in life.

Quoting a famous writer about a rich, powerful man, Ray Lawler said: "How strange that a man clever enough to make all this money is stupid enough to think he needs it."

When he wrote *The Doll* and another play *The Resignation*, Ray Lawler spent eighteen months writing it day after day at the Melbourne Public Library.

My suggestion is for a plate or inscription to be made at a table saying *The Doll* was written here after many summers.

Why don't we advocate it?

Doll Trilogy schedules —

Other Times	December 14 to Jan 22
The Doll	January 24 to February 5
Kid Stakes	Feb 7
Other Times	Feb 8
The Doll	Feb 9
Kid Stakes	Feb 10
Other Times	Feb 11
February 12	*First Saturday of trilogy three plays with lunch & dinner breaks*
February 14	*Kid Stakes*
February 15	*Other Times*
February 16	*The Doll*
February 17	*Kid Stakes*
February 18	*Other Times*
February 19	*The three plays again*

THE CHARACTER OF OLIVE

Carole Skinner talks to Stan Marks

Olive a lady in 1937, made some major decisions in her life She was a very liberated woman for the period What do you feel about this?

It was quite evident from the script that she has taken one hell of a step forward for a lady of that period I just think it is pretty amazing that a woman has done that I think it is also a little difficult to believe especially when I first read that script - that a woman from that background should take such a giant step forward She has got so much at stake what else does she do? Does she go with convention or do the only thing to keep her man.

Is that why she is doing it?

More than anything else I don't think she is such an intelligent lady that she would rationally sit down and think this out It is obvious that everything she does is to keep her man I don't know what she does in *Other Times* (I haven't read the script yet) however, in a scene of *Kid Stakes*, the way we played it she will do anything she is clutching at straws in the last scene particularly I mean even in the mere fact that she is sleeping with Roo, the premarital thing about getting married a giant step I think it is set up when Olive hears Barney saying to Nancy 'It's you who said I couldn't keep creeping into your room at night in nothing but my money belt!' Olive twigs than thinks about what Nancy says in the following conversation about the guys being just fun but one doesn't change jobs or chance one's future on them I feel the decision is brought on by this conversation between Barney and Nancy and what Nancy has to say provokes her When Roo comes down with the doll the physical reality of the man turns her on and when she realises what is on his mind, it's inevitable that they do sleep together I feel it's not a purely sexual thing for these two, there is so much more going for

Olive and Roo as mates, even lifetime companions It is pretty evident, that with Roo and Olive it is the relationship of their lives

And because it is so important to her she is willing to do anything?

It is interesting to think that Olive's background is a strict upbringing by her Mother, some sort of Christian or conventional Church influence and from working class people of the time She has had a very wholesome upbringing I would say it is therefore interesting that she will make that sort of break, but then it is doubly interesting that such a decision could come out of that background She tends to question her Mother's ability to understand the situation in view of her own broken marriage feels it can't be that important - the actual piece of paper - when the marriages that she has been close to have come apart She must have seen that in the marriages of friends of her Mother also Olive is totally aware that there must be more to marriage than dependence on a man. The situation has been hastened along by the pressure of Roo saying he is going to leave and her Mother also comes on very heavily — but I don't think that she ever sat down and thought about it much

What about leaving her job to become a barmaid?

She is a pretty gutsy lady because she does actually make this decision earlier on when the Mother puts them on the line about going to Luna Park etc, Olive says 'It's about time I made a few decisions of my own'

Do you think she was just fed up with her Mother?

Not so much just fed up with Mother fed up with the whole working class situation Rather sick of convention and tired of being a sheep I wondered has she been forced into this decision by the home environment? She is befriended by a lady like Nancy who shows her there is more to life than sitting home waiting for a man, millinery and doing what Mum says! But I really cannot see that Olive is aware of what a big step she is taking She is a romantic and romantics aren't always that rational The 'decision' is merely a 'happening' it comes out of a lot of pressure from various areas which I think happens with a lot of so-called liberated ladies today a lot of them wave flags and say how liberated they are but if you scratch the surface under a lot of those ladies you will find a true romantic Ladies living with a bloke, and having babies out of wedlock etc, I am sure that a lot of them are doing it because of pressure from home or they are tired of a situation We accept it more now, that sort of thing

Carole Skinner (Olive) and David Downer (Dickie Pouncett) in the M.T.C.'s production of Kid Stakes
Photo: David Parker

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE – INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE

THE 10th CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ACTORS (F I A)

held in Vienna, 13th - 18th September 1976 HAL LASHWOOD (past President of Actors Equity) and ELIZABETH KIRKBY represented the Australian union at the Congress

According to a report by Hal Lashwood

An address delivered at the opening ceremony on behalf of the Mayor of Vienna mentioned the need to encourage people to attend live theatre, that the Mass Media had a responsibility to participate in this encouraging process, and it was fully accepted by the Austrian Government that theatres have to be subsidised.

In her opening speech the President of the F I A Madame France Delahalle, stressed the need to establish beyond doubt that performers are also creators because this has an important bearing on the question of copywright She also reminded delegates to pay more attention to the Third World and to defend the national cultures of these countries from exploitation by profit hungry multi-nationals

The following points led to resolutions carried by Congress

The cultural needs of men are as important as his material needs, and the performing arts, as a living element of culture, should be accessible to all

The world of the arts, as the base of the culture of society should lead in the effort to eradicate the denial of equal rights and opportunities to women to persue careers in the arts

The rapid development of the mass media, while contributing to the spread of culture in various productive ways, can also result in distorting the high concepts of the art of acting

Governments of member states should take cognizance of the training aptitude and talents of professional actors, singers and dancers and it is recommended that these talents be put to use in the field of social services

Regarding cultural exchanges these should be based upon authentic national productions rather than productions whose exchange value is merely the recovery of costs and thus utilized to displace the work of domestic artists.

It was also resolved to work out international minimum standards with respect to suplementary or residual payments to performers for the sale of programmes to a foreign country - and to submit petitions to the Governments of those countries where artists have to suffer from oppression, discrimination, and infringement upon artistic freedom, urging a solution to these problems, and to found a documentation and records centre for such declarations of solidarity

The Congress also stressed the importance of the Rome Convention for the Protection of Performers Producers and Broadcasters, urging all countries to ratify it so that it can be revised to include cable television

Regarding unemployment problems during discussions on various motions, delegates from Britain warned against having too many drama schools for fear of creating pools of unemployment American Equity (U S A) have concluded a survey which covers a span of 28 years, showing that during that period 85% of their members earn less the $US5,000 annually, and 50% are compelled to work outside the industry

I T I EDITOR WANTED

The present Editor of the ITI Newsletter will be away for six months from the end of December

Would any person interested in typing, editing and collating information for this publication, coping with the correspondence and generally caring for the Australian Centre, (which is situated in the Elizabethan Theatre Trust Building at Kings Cross,) for two days a week please write to Dr Merlis Thiersch, P O Box, 137 Kings Cross NSW 2011

June Collis, I.T.I Editor

international

AMERICAN LINE UP

(Photo A Chorus Line)

Al B. Weiner

Broadway's New Season

In 55 B C the Roman theatre was *in extremis* Roscius was dead and so was the art of acting The art of writing good plays had died with Terence over a century earlier Thus without the substance of art, or an audience that demanded it (or even recognized it when they saw it), the theatre catered to the vulgarian hordes, to the jaded palates of the philistines The stage gave itself up to athletics and sexual excess There was no real distinction made between comedy and tragedy on the one hand, and gladiatorial combats, executions, and the exhibition of sexual acts (e.g. the Floriale) on the other hand Typically theatre architecture is most grandiose when there is least to perform (the Sydney Opera House?), and in 55 B C when there was nothing to perform, Pompey built a theatre to hold 80,000 people It was three stories high and was supported by 160 columns The first floor was built of marble the second glass and the third gilded wood The lowermost columns were thirty-eight feet high, and placed between them were 3 000 bronze statues In that same year Cicero attended a performance in that theatre, and wrote about it in a letter to a friend " any feeling of cheerfulness was extinguished by the spectacle of such magnificence ... But what pleasure can it possibly be to a man of culture, when either a puny human being is mangled by a most powerful beast, or a splendid beast is transfixed with a hunting spear "

Is this meant to be an apt introduction to an article on the American stage of 1976 A D ? The author obviously thinks so but the reader will have to decide for himself after he reads on a bit First, however, it must be pointed out that when one speaks of the American theatre he is really talking about the New York theatre This is true in spite of the fact that there is far more theatrical activity out in the provinces than in the Big Apple, as New York City likes to call itself Probably the most vigorous outpouring of produced drama in the United States comes from the many hundreds of universities and colleges throughout the country There is hardly an institution of higher learning in this country that does not have a drama department and hardly a department that does not produce at least four "major" productions each year When the American Theatre Association annually polls tertiary institutions to find out what they are producing they typically mail out over 1,600 questionaires Thus I am talking about some 6,000 productions playing to an audience that numbers in the millions

A B WEINER formerly Associate Professor of Theatre at the University of New South Wales is Professor of Theatre at the State University of New York at Albany He is the author of three books and numerous articles mainly on Shakespeare He has also published several articles on the 19th century Sydney stage George Gaisbegen one of Australia's first playwrights thanks him from the grave for having restored his tarnished reputation In his spare time Dr Weiner directs plays his most recent being a production of *Streetcar Named Desire* this past April in Melbourne

Beyond this there are some dozens of regional, professional companies in major cities They consider themselves professional because they pay their personnel money, but in America **professional** means only New York If you haven't worked in the New York theatre you haven't worked in the professional theatre Occasionally a provincial actor will make a success in New York, and sometimes a regional play will be produced in New York But the general rule of thumb is that unless you have acted in the New York theatre you are an amateur

Finally, there are literally thousands of Community Theatres," companies comprised of the local citizenry who do it for love, or whatever No one except their friends and relations pays any attention to them So there is only New York, and to New York I shall address this article

The black Oz — The Wiz

To complicate matters even further there are three distinct levels of theatre in New York Broadway, Off Broadway, and *(mirabile dictu)* Off-Off-Broadway Broadway is of course the most important of the three and it is generally what one thinks of when and if he thinks of the New York stage It is big, glamourous, and expensive Off Broadway is a phenomenon that began in the 1950s when the cost of production on Broadway began to rise by giant leaps, when a show had to run successfully for six months just to break even While Off Broadway houses were generally in the Greenwich Village area of Manhattan, today they are all over the city, including Brooklyn It was, and perhaps still is, a junior version of Broadway The houses are smaller and more out-of-the-way, the plays are often (but not always) of greater intellectual significance the actors' salaries lower, and tickets cheaper In the late 60s however, when inflation and the trade unions began to force production costs to a figure that can only be described as astronomical, Off Off Broadway was born Economically Off-Broadway moved to where Broadway had been, and (up to a point) Off-Off Broadway occupied the position formerly held by Off Broadway The principle value of Off-Off Broadway is as a "showcase" for acting and writing talent the quality of production is far too uneven to have any other value

With this overview of American theatre the reader will rightly conclude that there is a great deal going on, and that this activity can only be a signal of great health That, however is mere illusion It is rather like a tubercular patient, shortly before he succumbs to the disease who suddenly finds within himself an inordinate sexual vigour and a nice, healthy glow on his cheeks

All of these symptoms are manifested in one short stretch of West 44th Street that fifty yards or so between Shubert Alley and 8th Avenue This is perhaps the very centre of the New York theatre district At the corner of Shubert Alley and 44th Street is the Shubert Theatre

Do not be deceived This is not the chic and expensive East Side This is the theatre district, the West Side, down and dirty Two short blocks away, down 8th Avenue, and you are on 42nd Street, the "Sin Capital" of the United States The street is so neon that you can read a Bible at midnight This is such a foul street that even decent whores do not frequent it the tastes of the denizens of 42nd Street do not run to anything as healthy as whoring A

Movie merquee throbbing with 20 000 watts of electricity proclaims its latest delectation *Wet Pussies* While (on a good night, but not tonight) Melpomene is doing her thing 75 yards away on 44th Street, here there is nothing but the absolute dregs of 2,000 years of civilization, lying in the street, leaning up against buildings, propositioning in front of porno houses, groups of black cats jivin' until their fix arrives, pimps pushers, addicts, vacant stares reflecting dope rotted brains An expensive car stops (a senator or movie star inside?), an unheard conversation with someone who walks over from the curb, a proposition of god-knows what is made, to sell or buy a thing a service, a person Name it, it s there and it's for sale This is Broadway This is the centre of the American theatre "There's a broken heart for every light on Broadway"

Enough, enough of 42nd Street Let us return to 44th, around the corner At the Majestic there is *The Wiz* a black version of the *Wizard of Oz*, at the Booth is *For Coloured Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, the Shubert is showing the hottest show in town, *A Chorus Line*. In spite of the fact that tickets are selling for $US17, they are almost unavailable After an archeological expedition by means of the time machine the St James dug up *Mr Fair Lady*, "The World's Greatest Musical!" And at last but certainly not least is *A Texas Trilogy* by Preston Jones, playing at the Broadhurst The Critics have declared it the most exciting dramatic show in New York, and so I shall return to it and discuss it at some length

Nor do things improve much off 44th Street I offer here a representative sample of what is playing at other Broadway houses *California Suite*, yet another Neill Simon comedy, *Chicago* with Gwen Verdon (a musical), *Equus* - Tony Perkins is back after having been replaced for a season by Elizabeth Taylor's former husband, *Godspell is still grinding* away, former husband; *Godspell* is still grinding away, as is *Grease* Would anyone believe me if I said that *Oh! Calcutta* has been revived? And *Pippin?* Well, they are and so is *Threepenny Opera*, but that at least is a classy show and deserves periodic revivals So you see 44th Street, is quite representative of what is going on in New York Harebrain comedies light musicals, and revivals of shows that do not deserve to be revived, in short, live television As I am writing this (the last week of October) there is not a single classic on Broadway and with the exception of *A Texas Trilogy* not a single serious piece

What's new? Australians who have not been to New York for a couple of years will be surprised to see large numbers of welldressed, middle class blacks among the theatre-goers Just a year ago a black theatre-goer was a rarity on Broadway, but suddenly they are appearing in strength Why? There has been a sudden burgeoning of black productions (not to be confused with "Black Theatre ' which is militant didactic and revolutionary) Much of it is just the tired old white middle-class garbage dressed up in blackface There is another new production of *Porgy and Bess* Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* loved it I have not seen this production nor will I the most charitable words I have for *Porgy and Bess* is that it is a dishonest bore (Bess, you is ma women now"

Good! I have mentioned two other black productions *The Wiz* and *Coloured Girls* It sounds incredible but there is also a black *Guys and Dolls* Another musical is *Bubbling Brown Sugar* and *Me and Bessie* about Bessie Smith, has music in it One revival – *Grease* gives us a black actor playing the original white lead And for the spiritual there is a play about Martin Luther King, *I Have a Dream*. And if all these goodies are not satisfying we are promised for later on in the season a musical about Josephine Baker and *A Broadway Musical*, which is a black musical about producing a black musical Duh times dey is a-changin

Perhaps the clearest indication that Broadway is in *extremis* is the very fact that *A Texas Trilogy* has rather set the town, and indeed the country, on its ear *A Texas Trilogy* was written by a newcomer to Broadway Preston Jones and was directed by Alan Schneider, perhaps America's most respected director Perhaps part of the reason it was so praised is that America has just discovered the South (thanks to Jimmy Carter,) and *A Texas Trilogy* is a bona fide Southern work Perhaps that is something for Americans to get excited about, but beyond that the work is unremarkable But if one is hungry enough, as apparently the New York critics are, one smacks his lips on a dry stale crust *A Texas Trilogy* is comprised of three full length plays *Lu Ann Hampton Laverty Oberlander*, *The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia*, and *The Oldest Living Graduate*

But the New York critics say that this is an important work, and surely they are honourable men Jones has a very good ear for the rhythms of speech, and he has nice comic sense He has not, however, as is the case with so many successful playwrights today, mastered the art of making a drama with a beginning, middle, and end Like Pinter his skill is in writing good dialogue, and as with Pinter, although perhaps a bit less, one has the feeling that Jones does not know in the beginning how the play will even end The trilogy is undoubtedly entertaining, yet all too often Jones' humour degenerates into one liners, good one liners but nonetheless mere appendages like a woman discussing her husband's sexual ability - "He couldn't get it up with a block and tackle", a woman describing life in a caravan ' Every time my husband would fart my eyes would sting for three days" or, describing a pious person 'She's as holy as Billy Graham's mother " These are simply gags designed to get a cheap laugh, as opposed to writing characters who are intrinsically funny

These plays are *tranches de vie*, the kind of stuff that William Inge was writing fifteen years ago, and the trouble with a slice of life is that they are usually cut at random and it is not easily determinable whence came the slice None of these plays begins at a particular moment of crisis in the hero's life, and when the play is over no particular obstacle has been overcome nothing has been solved *Lu Ann Laverty Oberlander* exemplifies this In Act I she is simply Lu Ann Hampton, a seventeen year-old high school student a mindless cheer leader whose only attractiveness is that she has a normal seventeen year-old exuberance for life In Act II she is a twenty seven year-old "beauty technician," already a bit faded Her first husband, Laverty has deserted her and their daughter In a cheap bar she is wooed and won by Corky Oberlander In Act III she is the thirty-seven year-old widow of Oberlander Her daughter is now seventeen and displays the same mindless vitality that her mother had in Act I A former high-school sweetheart is passing through Bradleyville and he calls on Lu Anne She glimpses what might have been and then he leaves Lu Ann s mother dies Curtain What will become of Lu Ann? Who knows? And except for the fact that she is a fellow human, who cares?

Burton in Equus *Photo Van Williams*

But Roscius is dead and that is a clear indication to me of the demise of the New York stage This production had everything going for it money, successful and influential producers and one of America's most successful directors, yet with a single exception they could not shake together a cast of better then-average actors Jones was a former actor and apparently knows enough about that craft to write juicy parts, the trilogy has many first-rate roles but only Fred Gwynne was equal to it You may recall Fred Gwynne a former Harvard divinity student (!) from those dreadful television shows, *The Munsters* and *Car 54 Where Are You* In the trilogy he plays Colonel Kincaid, a shell-shocked World War I veteran in *The Last Meeting* and *The Oldest Living Graduate* Having seen him act only on those television masterpieces I was positively shocked to witness a brilliant actor In this production no one came within a Texas mile of him, and that is sad There are very few outstanding actors left on the New York stage

But as New York taxi drivers have been heard to say "not to worry ' As the United States saved Europe in her moment of need so Europe is coming to our aid now Scheduled to open this season are Pinter s *No Man's Land* with Richardson and Gielgud *Otherwise Engaged* with Tom Courtenay, *Anna Christy* with Liv Ullman, *The Recruiting Officer* with Vanessa Redgrave a new German play called *Poor Murderer* with Maria Schell *The Innocents*, with Claire Bloom and *The Cherry Orchard* with Irene Worth I m embarrassed

Theatre in Education

A SENSE OF INVOLVEMENT

Peter Wilkins

Elspeth Angus, Julia Stokes, Peter Wilkins, Robyn Callen, John Low

PETER WILKINS was born in Adelaide in 1945. A trained teacher, B.A. Dip. T. (Speech & Drama), who has worked with Theatre 62 since its inception in 1975. He has extensive experience in both the teaching and theatre fields.

"The T.I.E. programme supported the notion that theatre experience and involvement has to be harnessed educationally to provide alternative teaching methods."

This reaction by a teacher to a programme performed by the five teacher/performers of the Theatre 62 Theatre-in-Education Team encompasses an awareness of the significant role that T.I.E. is able to play in the schools and the community.

However, innovative expression of this role is closely bound to the individual aspiration and concepts of team members and a fervent belief that theatre enables an exploration of human values and social issues through dramatic presentation while education can best be described as a process of learning by example and practice. It is the unification of these two fundamental principles that has become the trademark of the work done by the T.I.E. Team during its first two years of existence.

An idealistic commitment to a philosophy of theatre in education has little relevance unless it can be justified and proven by the types of programmes that the team devises. Initially, the five members who were selected to be on the team agreed that it was important to devise programmes that would heighten the social awareness of the secondary school students with whom they would be working, and in some way enable them to become actively involved in the programme so that they could not only react freely to the stimulus that theatre could provide, but also express their own attitudes in such a way that they could show concern for the social issues and learn from the situations that the team created in performance and from the opinions that their peers expressed during moments of open involvement.

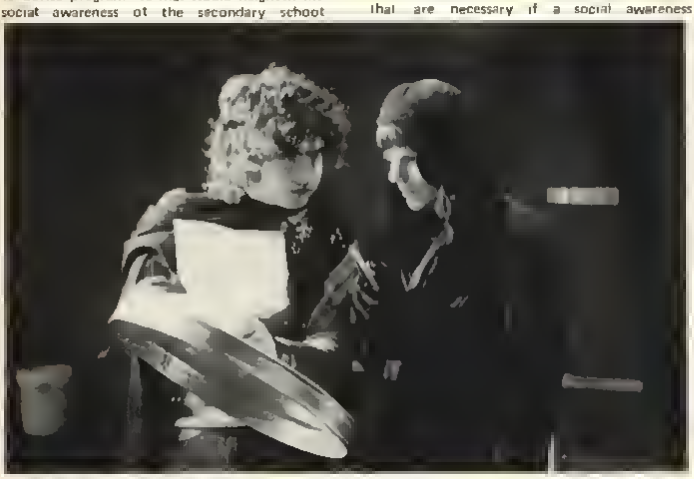
The Who/Why/Where/What/ Show of social awareness illustrates the style in which the team has chosen to present its particular philosophy of Theatre in Education, by which students may become extremely involved in the issues they see presented, and concerned for the various characters with whom they may discuss various personal problems related to the social issue with which a particular programme may deal.

Because theatre-in-education is such a committed and personal concept, we have found it vital that programmes should be devised by team members and incorporate the various skills that individual team members possess. It would be virtually impossible to find all the skills that T.I.E. demands in one individual, who could be a performer, teacher, writer, dancer, musician, artist, mime artist, gymnast and stage manager, not to mention a highly efficient and diplomatic administrator as well. Nonetheless, we have found it not only essential, but extremely exciting that as many of these attributes as possible should be evident in a team of five. They are important qualities that are necessary if a social awareness programme is to excite students so that they will be automatically stimulated to such an extent that they want to become involved in the issues that are raised.

"Hello. We're the Theatre-in-Education Team. I'm Peter. I'm Elspeth. I'm Robyn. I'm Julia. I'm John. Today we're going to present a programme of Marriage. In the first half of the programme you'll see six different couples before they get married and we'll be asking you to mark problems that you think they may face when they get married on the sheets that you were given as you came in. In the second half of the programme we will give the problems that you selected to the couples and you will be invited to talk with them and advise them on their problems." And now, on with *Marriage-Go-Round*.

The first half of the programme is a performance of the short scenes with breaks between each scene when students may briefly talk about types of people they have seen, and mark problems on the sheets. The involvement is essentially passive and there is no demand to become a physical participant. Because the issue is relevant to students, they are eager to select problems. That is as far as they wish to become involved at this particular stage.

The second half of the programme opens with a marriage service which is interspersed with divorce statistics before the problems are given to the team members to improvise. After each improvisation, students are then invited to discuss the problems and possible solutions with the team members who remain in character throughout the entire discussion. It is at this point that the marriage of theatre and education stimulates the greatest involvement. As far as the audience is concerned the characters are real, even though one male member of the team plays all the male roles. But it is imperative that the team members remain in character so that the audience can readily identify with the characters, the situation and the problems that exist in the marriage. By this stage, the students have been interested by the issue of marriage, they have appreciated the humour and drama of the performance, they have voted on whether marriages will be successful or unsuccessful in each case and they have selected their own problems for the couples. Now they are able to discuss with those couples and advise them. The process of involvement has been a gradual one, and the degree of involvement has developed during the course of the two hour programme. By the end of the programme, students have been almost unconsciously encouraged to respond to problems that the characters face and learn about the solutions that may be available to people who face certain difficulties in marriage.



Preparing for a workshop performance — *Photo: Theatre 62*

They have learnt by example and practice in response to a simple, but involving, theatrical experience

The process of involvement is largely indefinable It is achieved by accident or experimentation It is accompanied by constant re-evaluation, team discussion, flexibility and feedback from students and staff *Marriage-Go-Round* offered a format which was immediately successful but other programmes on migrants and women's role in society underwent many changes and alternative formats before we could be more if not totally satisfied with the sense of involvement that these social awareness programmes were capable of achieving

'We came to your place where you had promised to lead us towards a worthwhile and exciting experience which you certainly did!'

It is with certain trepidation that many students arrive for a full day's activity at the T I E Team's base, Theatre 62, an intimate, well equipped yet unsophisticated theatre in the Adelaide suburb of Hilton. Before the Education Department leased the theatre in July, 1975, the T I E Team felt itself restricted by programmes that could be done only in schools The social awareness programmes, anthologies and drama workshops were offering new experiences to many schools, but the team was still acutely conscious of the fact that students were not being given the ample opportunity to explore the most significant aspect of Theatre-in Education "learning by doing"

The acquisition of Theatre'62 by the South Australian Education Department for the Theatre-in Education Team offered a new dimension to the process of involvement, whereby students could practically participate in a learning situation, and be personally responsible for their own creative endeavours

Because of the fortunate transition to a base of its own, the Team was able to put into practice a programme which had been devised at the outset but never tried during the first six months of the team's existence At last, *Playday* became a vital part of the team's repertoire

The team believed that students, who were studying a certain text in the classroom would become far more involved in the text as a piece of Living Theatre if they were given the opportunity to actively participate in thematic interpretations of the script, and through improvisation or minimal use of the actual text present their own scenes, that could enable them to communicate their attitudes towards the characters events and themes of the play

As always, it is necessary to provide a format that would stimulate the imagination and encourage involvement by the students, many of whom may have had little or no dramatic experience, and some of whom may never have been to a theatre Hence the trepidation "Are we going to see a performance of *Macbeth*" Are we watching a rehearsal?" "Is it a lecture on *Macbeth*?" "I hope we don't have to act" For senior secondary students and students of tertiary institutions the sense of involvement may be frightening For this very reason the format of the *Playday* becomes extremely important The development of involvement from a basic introduction to a far more complex and theatrical conclusion to the day's activity needs to be carefully nurtured

As the students enter, they are aware of a large chess board on the stage floor in the middle of the theatre After the usual introduction Robyn invites them to remove their shoes and come onto the floor where everybody joins in a movement workshop, which is simple and enjoyable By now, the feeling of trepidation has already diminished slightly, and another team member divides them into two teams, and explains the rules of the game they are about to play, in this case *Macsnakes and Lady Ladders* (Each team must spin the Wheel of Fortune The team moves along the board that number of squares If they land on a fair square, they must choose one of a number of characters they have been given and justify his or her actions in the play, *Macbeth* as fair If the team lands on a foul or dark square, they must justify the actions as foul Initially they are given ten minutes to devise a short improvisation which must in some way involve all members of the team These scenes are then presented to each other, and discussion follows before the wheel is spun for the next scene

A playday on Macbeth *Photo Theatre '62*

Members of the team act as judges and advisors Each spin of the wheel may introduce new rules For example they must use sound and lighting effects They must include a mime sequence They must offer a modern interpretation of the scene Or they must show the whole play as fair or foul, either traditionally or as a modern concept Later costumes, props and basic sets may be used and members of the teams become responsible for the technical side of the presentation The team, as judges, may impose various penalties if the approach has not been justified, or if certain technical requirements have not been fulfilled

The first scene is generally hesitant, but as the day develops students become more aware of the demands, both theatrical and interpretational Working together as a team, they explore the text as literature and theatre and by criticising each other they develop an awareness of the demands of the play and the theatrical facilities they are called upon to use to make their scenes work dramatically and thematically They are learning by doing, and they are learning together Just as we learn from each other as a Team, so too we are attempting to help them learn as a team Yet again, students have become unwittingly involved, and through this involvement created something, which is undeniably their own

Naturally enough, formats, programmes, aims and philosophies are always changing Theatre and Education are transient, according to the society and the people who live in it That is the challenge for Theatre in Education and a challenge on which any creative T I E Team should thrive As the needs of students in secondary schools or community groups with whom we also work change, so must our approach to the methods we employ to involve people in Theatre in Education

The Theatre '62 Theatre-in-Education Team of South Australia is ever aware of the need for change, which is the very lifeblood of our existence As a result of this philosophy, we work as a cooperative within the team although ultimately responsible to the Education Department We have no leader or figurehead, because this tends to represent for us, at any rate, a certain rigidity, which we as individuals wish to avoid As a team we have come to respect each other's various skills, and assume that the essence of leadership will shift according to the various skills that need to be expressed at any given time This very cooperative element tends to make us rely greatly on each other, and develop as a team the type of Theatre in Education which we are attempting to achieve

Only by our deep and committed sense of involvement in our own work and the future of Theatre-in-Education in this country can we hope to foster that same sense of involvement in important social issues or educational achievements amongst the students and community groups of South Australia

technical

DESIGNERS DIFFICULTIES

Alan Lees

ALAN LEES is the Head of Design at N I D A, the Secretary of the Designer's Association for the Performing Arts, and a free lance designer

Two major topics have been discussed by many designers in Australia in recent months, workshop facilities and the imported designer. Many are critical, but perhaps both designers and managements need to face the problem and find a solution together.

Design is not just the final product as seen on stage, but a concept that is, one would hope, perfected in the workshops as a team effort between the designer and the workshop staff. Perfected in the workshop? Too often this is not the case, not that this is always the fault of many of our craftsmen, but more often than not it is the lack of experience and opportunity to work with new techniques and materials, the lack of technical assistance from overseas sources, and a degree of short sightedness by some managements. When one looks at overseas design techniques and designers, one invariably looks to the workshops which produce these production designs as sets, costumes and properties, work shops with many resources unknown in Australia. We are still in the age of wood and canvas, fibreglass is still in its virgin years as far as the total exploration of its theatrical uses is concerned. Projection is almost non existant and suitable equipment is not even readily available in Australia.

How much of the blame lies not only with the managements playing safe, but also with the designers? Both often leave too much to chance, with late decisions and a lack of pre planning. Theatre is after all a business, we must all approach it as such.

For many years, most of the productions from J C Williamsons have been design copies of the overseas original, usually mounted in Australia without any direct involvement by the original designer, and rebuilt in our local workshops from photographs and sketches. It is worth noting that one of the exceptions to this policy was *Camelot*, designed by John Truscott then living in Melbourne and available to the workshop staff. The designs for this production bought international acclaim.

Can Australian designers look forward to more of these opportunities from the new J C Williamson management?

The Old Tote Theatre Company in Sydney is aiming at a balance between resident and guest designers and overseas designers and directors. As well as two resident designers, there have been guest designers from Sydney Melbourne and Adelaide during 1976 and plans for the first season of 1977 reveal a similar balance. How often does this interstate exchange of designers occur, when was there a guest designer at the Queensland Theatre Company or at the National Theatre in Perth? The South Australian Theatre Company has yet to announce its plans, but will bring an English designer to Adelaide for a period of six months in 1977. The Melbourne Theatre Company, with forward thinking, has in recent times given opportunities to young designers to work within the company structure and to develop their abilities as designers with small workshop productions and in particular at the Grant Street Theatre. How many opportunities are given by other companies to young designers as design assistants?

For the 1976 Adelaide Season at the Festival Centre, The Australian Opera mounted three performances of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* and imported two designers from England Timothy O'Brien and Tazeena Firth. With two trips each to Australia for the production, the company have sets for the opera designed in such a way the production will not fit any other Australian theatre. Are Sydney or Melbourne audiences ever to see this expensive "import" production? And are the international designers any more practical than some of our local designers?

There are a number of opera designs that have been commissioned from designers that have never reached final production – the *Aida*

Part of the Old Tote Workshop, Alexandria. *Photo Old Tote*

of 1972/73, the Stefanos Lazaridis *Carmen* and the John Stoddart *Patience* of 1976. It is said that the estimated cost of these productions went well beyond all financial bounds. And just how 'new' would these new productions have been. Was the Lazaridis *Carmen* a close copy of his 1970 London Coliseum production and the Stoddart *Patience* from his concept for the 1975 London production? Is this really how "original" designers and managements are thinking! And the "new" production of *Cosi fan Tutti* last January with wonderful set designs by Henry Berdon incomplete and but a pale copy of his 1968 London production. How important is it that a relatively new and expanding company with the potential of The Australian Opera mount copies of overseas productions. We know, it has been proved, that they are capable of much more.

When one looks at the impressive list of productions from The Australian Ballet, there is but slight evidence of works designed in this country. *Cinderella* in 1972 was the first and last full length ballet designed by a resident Australian designer.

Both The Australian Opera and The Australian Ballet have engaged a number of expatriate designers over the past few years. Many of our designers wonder if, to work in these two fields in Australia, they need to leave the country and return on higher fees, all expenses paid, as 'international guests'. But are our Australian designers who wish to design for the national companies prepared to gain and give experience by designing for the smaller but equally important state companies? Are our managements prepared to attend these productions by state companies to seek and support Australian artists or are their policies truely "international"? The excuse that overseas directors must work with overseas designers is a thin case for major importation. The Australian Opera have successfully mounted productions in the past with Australian designers and overseas directors.

So what are Australian managements looking for in designers, any "international" name to print in their programme, a fashionable "decorator" with overseas or local connections, or a top designer who will leave behind more than just a few sets and costumes, a designer who will in some way give a worthwhile experience to workshop and audience alike.

How many designers, whether resident or overseas, are prepared to spend the long and often lonely hours, day after day working with our workshop craftsman and finding better techniques? How many designers are capable or even interested in being more than "decorators"?

We must import designers that bring new ideas to stimulate our performing arts, but they must be the best in the world, possibly Josef Svoboda from Prague, Robert O'Hearn from New York, or Ralph Koltai from London.

We must have more Australian designers travelling if necessary, to work with our imported guest directors. We must also look to the export of our better design talents on an exchange basis as we are doing with great success with many opera singers.

With the tremendous financial pressures facing all of the arts, how much of this pressure could be eased by less or more selective importation? There are many questions that we all must ask. We must question ourselves and our managements. We must all decide where our priorities are the the future of the Australian Performing Arts.

Australian Opera's Lakme *Designed by Australian Desmond Digby.* *Photo: A.O.*

Old Tote's Love for Love *designed by Australian Alan Lees.* *Photo: Old Tote*

Amateur

BRINGING IN PROFESSION

ROBERT LEVIS, professional director working with an amateu

Most of my career has been spent with professionals, but one reaches a stage in life – is it middle age? – when you think all right I've had the opportunity as a professional of working with marvellous people who ve taught me a heck of a lot, it's time to start passing a little of it on

But not to other professionals?

I wouldn't *dream* of trying to teach professionals Heavens above, they're trained, they know as much as I do

I ve chosen to pass on what I ve learned to the enthusiastic amateur Sybil Thorndike said the word amateur simply meant someone who loves what they do Some professionals are amateurs in that sense too – they love what they do

How would you define, or characterise, the amateur beyond that?

It's very easy for the professional – it's sort of the in thing – to sneer at the amateur actor I find that the borders between amateurism and professionalism are getting more and more grey

Perhaps that's because when I was starting off in Sydney a lot of the little theatres were actually amateur – in other words the professional actor worked on the little theatre stage for no money for the love of his craft He earned his living in radio and indulged himself on the stage It didn't matter whether you got paid for it or not You gave of your best always and you existed under the disciplines of theatre – the hard rehearsals and all the rest of it

When I go into the amateur theatre today I still see excellent performances and I see tremendously *dedicated* people People for instance who are employing me now so they can learn as much as they can about the craft of acting I take my hat off to them for the work that they do

Less and less now do you find the professional actor in Australia going to workshops It might be putting a cat in among pigeons, but I find the Australian actor a little bit on the lazy side

The amateur too?

No no, no I find there's been a resurgence of the amateur spirit More and more groups are taking advantage of such organisations as the Arts Council and the Australia Council who help pay a professional's fee so the professional can go out and conduct workshops or do a production Adjudications, too for Drama Festivals – the standard is getting higher each year With constructive criticism being given to the amateur his work is improving – and audiences are benefiting from that

Generally speaking, I think the professional does have one thing in his favour he has had more experience and training If, by going to an amateur group a professional can give them the chance to realise that they're on the right track, to bolster their confidence in themselves – if nothing else happens, that's a very positive thing for that group to get

It's like that magic wand or secret recipe that some people think actors must have When I first went to the Royal Shakespeare Company I thought– God there must be some secret that makes them so great But, working with them, I realised its just hard work and absolute dedication and concentration Otherwise, they re human, no magic wand or sprinkling of fairy dust So if a professional can go to an amateur group and get them to realise that – OK, they are on the right track – all it requires is a little bit more from them

You've had a lot of experience in workshopping with amateurs – you have, for instance, a vacation class next January in Sydney

Well, of course, you skim the surface as far as any technical training is concerned There's very little one can do in a fortnight's drama school But one of the important things is to encourage the enthusiasm that is there, and help foster the desire that people have to learn something about the craft of acting

They are diverse groups?

Inevitably Mostly people in their final year of high school who've done some high school plays They are wondering what is involved in becoming a professional actor – a case of putting the toe in and testing the bath water The second group would be the teachers – those who have the job of then going back and teaching drama to their students One thing that has surprised me is that a lot of teachers have no faith in their children's capacity to use their imaginations I think because of TV because of our "modern society" the imagination we all start out with becomes stifled, atrophied, dies up – so we can get the case of a teacher who simply forgets that an eight year old, a ten year old child has still got a remarkable imagination

Students, teachers – how do you tailor the workshop to fit different needs?

One tries to do what one can There's also the housewife who comes along and the amateur from the dramatic society who wants to get a little more training or guidance

I always start off by saying I can't teach anything about acting but I try to create an atmosphere whereby people can learn something for themselves It is said that actors are born, not made I think that's absolutely true But most people are – born, that is And I think everyone has got that talent to act

You've only got to watch a five year old child – heavens above, they re marvellous – the ability to throw themselves into a situation to believe utterly in what they re doing for that length of time – and then they're called in for tea and immediately they switch back from that level of fantasy into reality We've all got that talent, we re all born with it But what happens unfortunately is that various things are driven out of us we're forced to put up barriers, protections against society So the workshop process as I see it is to try to get back some of that talent, relearn some of the

ROBERT LEVIS is a director actor with an extensive list of professional credits here and abroad More recently his work has been with amateur groups – as an adjudicator at Fest vals as a visiting director as a leader of workshops and he has recently been appointed Artistic Director of Newcastle's amateur Repertory Club for six months. Theatre Australia speaks with Mr Levis about this preference

Rigging the set at Newcastle Rep *Photo Newc Rep*

THE
LS

y, talks to Theatre Australia

things we used to have when we were children

And how do you teach people to find out about themselves to start with? That is, I think, the first step Find out about yourself how you operate, how you react to certain situations be very analytical about your emotions, about what you can do with your body

There are certain sensitivity exercises that make people aware of their bodies and their reactions Some people, for instance, come in with a fear of being touched they get very nervous about it We try to break down a lot of the inhibitions in a gentle way We try to make them a little bit more tolerant of other people's behaviour An actor's got to develop sensitivity towards other people and some of the exercises are designed towards this

We also try to delve into characterisation being aware how other people would react, specific characters. It's pretty superficial, what you can teach in a fortnight, but at least the students say, can get a certain taste of what would be in store for them if they want to be professionals

What about your new job - six months as Artistic Director with the amateur Newcastle Repertory Club?

People say to me "Why go to Newcastle? Why work with an amateur company? You could be in London you could be in America, you could be doing this, you could be doing that "

I chose this because I want to do it I find it exciting I find it a challenge

It's an established group and a very successful one It would be very easy for them to sit back complacently and say we're doing very well thank you why should we try to improve our standards The fact that they really want to and are going to the trouble without a great grant from anybody out of their own funds of employing me to help is an indication, that there's a spirit there, that their heart's in the right place

Your brief is to pursue an already established policy ?

Yes, now I realise they have a policy that's you could call it middle-of-the-road conservative, with regard to choice of plays That doesn't worry me because I love theatre and I find all forms entertaining I adore Shakespeare but I love pantomime, French farce, who-dunits, drawing-room comedies

Frankly, I wouldn't be doing any different plays here if there were no policy restrictions, because I believe theatre should serve its audience When I went to Alice Springs I directed *Don's Party* and it was a great success, but I wouldn't dream of doing *Don's Party* here for this particular Society, because I just don't think their audience would like it And why should I insist on doing, say, *Ride Across Lake Constance* which would confuse - and does confuse a lot of people simply because it's a play I would like to do and so alienate a lot of the members? Whereas I could do *Absurd Person Singular*, which I enjoy just as much as *Constance*

I do want to do club nights here we've planned about seven of them where we can do more experimental plays and attract perhaps some more adventurous people broaden their outlook that, I think, is part of my job One plants seeds, and from that all sorts of things can grow

You'll be taking all the directing jobs - the four productions, the seven club nights, the workshops which in your absence would've been taken by amateur club members ...

Yes I'm having open rehearsals Every rehearsal will be open to all members to attend A number of the group's pool of directors have already expressed the desire to act as my stage manager, or assistant, or on the technical crew - so that they will be able to attend *every* rehearsal and learn as much as they can from the way I go about directing

The company on stage for Arsenic and Old Lace *Photo Newc Rep*

And I'm not suggesting my way is the only way I'll offer alternatives to them we can do this or we can do that but I chose this, for whatever reason Hopefully that will be helpful to them

I'm very conscious of being put on the line here as a professional director Can't you imagine people coming along on the first night of the first production saying now, is it going to be as good as the standard we usually get? If it's up to standard, I'll be happy - don't know that I want to achieve any more than that with the first production By the fourth - it may be a classic of some kind I will try to do the production in a way that will be still relevant to the community, will be a little bit different, provide a lot of entertainment and maybe plant some of those seeds from which will grow other thoughts open up new directions for the group

I don't want to set out to prove that I'm a better director than the locals That's not the point at all But I hope by the end of the six months that the fact that a professional has been here has given the group an added impetus, given more power to the voice with which they already speak to the community I hope that may prove something about what the professional and the amateur - has got to offer

MAKE UP HINT NO 5 FROM LEICHNER OF LONDON

Suggested Basic Requirements for MIDDLE AGED MAN

This is a mature face, still with some youthful features Facial colouring remains pleasantly warm and alive *Foundation* Colouring should be selected according to type e g , Form C no 3½ with a little no 8 gives a light, normal skin tone, Form C no 4½ gives a rugged, outdoor tint, while no 6 with a little no 8 or no 9 gives a healthy warm tint with a slightly sallow undertone *Shading* Form C no 16 Deep Brown mixed with Form G no 25 Crimson Lake, creating pools of shadow accentuated with highlights, not hard lines *Highlights* No 5 is most effective although no.20 (white) may be necessary under strong lighting *Cheek colour* Form G no. 25 Crimson Lake, sometimes also blended with Form C no 8 *Lips* When colour is necessary, apply no 9 lightly and outline faintly with no 25, Crimson Lake *Eyes* Use "shading" material (Form C no 16 and Form G no. 25) at inner corner of eye hollow, or Form G no 32 on eyelids. Line eyes along line of lashes with no 78 Wax Eyebrow Pencil (or long wooden pencil), using same pencil, if necessary, in soft, feathery vertically inclined lines on eyebrows, where an occasional touch with a grey wooden pencil might be advantageous *Hair* Slightly greyed use white or lt grey hair powder sparingly streak hair at temples etc with white grease paint of other white cosmetic *Powder* with Rose or Brownish Blending Powder pat well in and dust off with cottonwool Copyright

Opera

CAPITAL OPERA

David Gyger

Canberra, apparently, is just the right sort of community to accomplish miracles virtually overnight in the esoteric field of grand opera if the standard achieved in its November production of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* can be maintained, the future of the fledgling opera company in the national capital would seem to be all but assured despite the grim economic climate on the arts front.

Canberra Opera was founded only six years ago under a different name, and did not mount its first subscription series until this year. I first encountered its work at the Musica Viva Spring Festival of 1974 when it mounted Malcolm Williamson's *The Red Sea* for a couple of afternoon performances in the 1200-seat Canberra Theatre, and did two "mini operas" in the foyer of the theatre after evening concerts, and I also saw its production of Verdi's *La Traviata* in June 1975.

It was clear that all these productions were the work of a newly formed group of enthusiastic amateurs: there were touches of professionalism, but one continually had to make allowances for production and musical farings. All were of a standard roughly comparable with the work of most of the minor Sydney opera companies, with the important difference that *The Red Sea* and *Traviata* were put on in the big, hard to manage Canberra Theatre which has a difficult acoustic for opera, as even the Australian Opera has found. And of course, a fully professional stage area, with the inbuilt capacity to swallow alive amateur scale productions. It is most heartening to be able to report now that Canberra Opera has obviously learned a good many lessons from its past failings. The recent *Trovatore* production was cheap (less than $200 cash outlay by repute, in terms of scenery etc) but not nasty, the costumes mostly borrowed. The available resources were obviously concentrated on the heart of the matter: musical and dramatic quality. And the gamble, if such it was, paid off.

All you need for *Il Trovatore*, it has been said, is the four best singers in the world, and there is more than a grain of truth in the claim: even if convolutions of the bizarre plot are worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan at their worst, the score literally teems with Verdi's genius at its most lyrical, and familiar arias, duets and trios follow hard the one upon the other. And even if Canberra couldn't get the four best singers in the world to fill the main roles, it mustered enough talent to produce a good few moments of the spine tingling vocal excitement that pervades this opera and engulfs all the petty objections about its inherent faults in a torrent of sound.

That only one of the four principals is a resident of Canberra is irrelevant: all except tenor Ron Stevens were drawn from outside the ranks of the principals of the national opera company, and their total effort was of a calibre to stimulate excitement and interest in opera among the uninitiated rather than put them off the art form for life as the 1975 *Traviata* might well have done.

I found the performances of the two male leads most impressive, but this was partly due to the fact that I had previously seen both in the same roles and there had been so much improvement in the interim. Stevens's Manrico for Sydney's suburban Rockdale company in November 1972 was very much in a formative stage: it was apparent right from his first (off stage) phrase that his Canberra one was going to be far and away the most lyrical piece of singing I have ever heard from him. He was dramatically strong, as usual, but for the first time had achieved a velvety smoothness of tone that omens great things for his future.

Similarly, baritone Neville Wilkie, the Count di Luna of the night, sang with assurance and achieved far more dramatic credibility than in the Queensland performances I have seen him in over the past few years (as Germont in *Traviata*, the title role in *Rigoletto*, and di Luna at the 1974 Innisfail Festival). It is hard to say the least, to understand why the A.O. has allowed Wilkie to languish in its chorus for a couple of years even if it does have an over abundance of fine principal baritones: a young talent such as his simply must be afforded the opportunity to develop through the challenge involved in creating new and major roles over a period of time.

Two other major components of the 1974 pre-Christmas *Trovatore* at Innisfail, conductor John Curro and mezzo-contralto Dorothea Deegan, also appeared in the Canberra production. Miss Deegan's Azucena was vocally sound on both occasions, though not quite as full throated and melodramatically powerful as one would have liked, but she was badly made up and wigged in the Canberra production and failed at any stage to establish the illusion that she was really the gypsy hag her character demands. Joan Richard's Leonora was pleasing if not quite of the dramatic and vocal calibre of the other principals: rightfully, though, Canberra Opera prefers to use resident principals wherever possible, and afford them the opportunity to develop their talent rather than import marginally superior outsiders.

The lesser roles were quite well cast from the ranks of the local company, particularly John Garlick as Ferrando, and the enormous chorus (48 members) produced some very nice sounds — and even managed somehow to muster more men than women, a major accom-

Lesley Stender (Delilah) and John Main (Samson) in Rockdale's Samson and Delilah

plishment in amateur circles It is a thoroughly sensible solution to the perennial problem of small, unskilled voices to compensate with numbers for the inherent lack of individual vocal power And Cutro got some excellent sounds from his 37 – piece orchestra, with out – at least most of the time – allowing them to drown out their colleagues on stage in a theatre where the orchestra always has an unfair advantage due to a structural acoustic problem

Franco Cavarra's production was straight forward and sensible and Peter Cooke's des igns nothing less than brilliant in their simplic ity and effectiveness at such low cost a series of vertically hanging ropes to mark the limits of the stage action were augmented by a number of small pieces of scenery flown from above the stage to drilleentrate the eight scenes of the opera Props were kept to a minimum, making scene changes mostly a question of pushing buttons Though the moon in Act I Scene 2 swayed disconcertingly through the action all were visually effective and some – in particular, the huge cross and tripartite gothic window of the cloister of Act II Scene 2, each section tenanted by an enormous candle – were stunningly effective

Rockdale's production , a week earlier, of Saint-Saen's *Samson and Delilah* was also a thoroughly rewarding evening, even if it did not rise quite so far up the ramparts of semi-professionalism Within the extreme limitations of the Rockdale Town Hall, Doug Kingsman's scenery was most effective where it mattered most – the collapse of the temple at the end when the rear corners of a giant tapestry, suspended over the stage area, were released at the vital moment so it swung vertically toward the audience and the lights suddenly dimmed so the chorus could only vaguely be seen fielding the huge false pillars to preserve them for future performances and avoid getting clonked on the head

The two central characters sang beautifully although Lesley Stander's Delilah was a trifle slow off the mark and her big Act I aria lacked some of the impact it ideally ought to have John Main was nothing less than stunning as Samson, reasserting his right to be deemed among the very top ranks of Australia's resident tenors despite some years of semi retirement Hopefully it will not be long before he is seen on the stage of the Opera House with the national company The other main role that of the high priest, was well filled by Sydney's ubiquitous suburban baritone Roger Howell

Samson and Delilah is in many ways an ideal choice for an opera company of limited resources, such as Rockdale it is a musically worthy piece with only three (one could al most say two) roles of importance, apart from the denouement, it poses no particular staging problems It was a pity, though, that the 'wild bacchanale' of the last act did not come closer to the ' riot of voluptuousness" the plot summary in the program promised the ballet was a curious pot-pourri of Balinese temple dance gymnastic cartwheels and calisthenics with the girls lying on their backs and wriggling their toes about, though the gentlemen of the chorus, some of whom are no longer in the first of youth, obviously slavered over every moment of it

And the orchestra, under the baton of Cedric Ashton was too often below its own best form – particularly the strings, which were quite noticeably off pitch at times Such faults detracted from the undeniable excellence of the major protagonists, and the Canberra experience proved such musical waywardness need not necessarily be tolerated even in semi-professional opera

The Cameo Group gave *Socio Voca, Op 1* by Maureen Callman, its first performances at the music room of the Sydney Opera House in mid-November It was the second half of a program presented with the assistance of the Australia Council, the first half of which (a poorly planned and no more than adequately presented concert of decidedly second-rate 20th-century music) is best forgotten

Socio Voce was a fairly brief foray into the realms of off-beat vocal sound with a minimal claim to be regarded as opera or music theatre, a promising enough situation was set up, but nothing developed As part of an otherwise more meaty evening, it might have been an interesting workshop exercise

A far more rewarding evening was pres ented downstairs at the Seymour Centre, Sydney University, early in October, by the Mused Performance Ensemble when music theatre works by Ross Edwards and Alan Holley were performed in close liaison with the Dance Company (N S W)

Its most interesting third was Edward's *Kan touk II*, which made superb use of the venue, was never less than interesting visually and sometimes shattering dramatically, but even the two Holley works, *Something A Piece Mistrited*, and *The Undying Hole*, both showed considerably more promise in this area than the Cameo attempt The result was a demanding evening which was far from de void of creative stimulation and artistic re-wards

THEATRES - PLEASE NOTE

Theatre Australia is collating the material for the theatre section of the Performing Arts Year Book of Australia

Professional companies, Amateur comapnies, T.I.E. Teams, please send information of 1976 programme including all above-mentioned information to:

Theatre Publications Ltd.,
7 President Place,
New Lambton Heights,
N S W 2305

Books

FRIENDS AND PALACES

Helen van der Poorten

A Handful of Friends, By David Williamson, Currency Press Ltd, 1976 Recommended retail price $3 00
Picture Palace Architecture in Australia, Ross Thorne Sun Academy series, 1976. Recommended retail price $7 95

At the present time there is little point in adding to the numerous critical comments we have read recently on David Williamson's *A Handful of Friends*. But it is pleasant to see that Currency Press has risen somewhat triumphantly from a recent theatre of liquidation to publish Williamson's play in the clear and utterly readable way we associate with their publications I have commented before that for readers it may be more interesting to have the illustrations of performance distributed throughout the text, but Currency's first duty is no doubt to the actors who will, it is hoped, make the most use of these plays

In a brief introduction director Rodney Fisher considers the thematic concerns of Williamson as well as a few of his own concerns He discusses the notion that the Australian artist belongs to an oppressed minority and while I would not question this it seems to me better when he leaves this subject for Williamson's work itself His comments on the playwright's habit of probing the "layers of subterfuge" in his character gives a new dimension to Williamson criticism

Professor Ross Thorne tells us in his introduction to *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia* that as a child he was as fascinated by the indirect lighting and the plaster troughs of Sydney's Lyceum Theatre as he was by

Snow White In many ways his entertaining and intelligent book is a tribute to the picture palaces that so rivalled the films they were built to contain

A diverting book for the beach and a serious one for architecture, art and theatre students, Thorne's book is a largely pictorial study of Australian cinemas He is quick to point out that picture theatres are not substantially different from live theatre buildings, but apart from telling us that most of the big city cinemas catered also for live productions, he narrows his study to cinemas as buildings from the first decade of this century to the beginning of World War II

Ross Thorne traces the origins of picture palaces to "Roxy" Rothapfel's atmospheric experiments on his patrons in pre World War I U S A , then looks at early Australian cinemas, many of them open-air ones, before turning to his chief concerns, the escapist fantasies, the "cathedrals of motion pictures" which culminate in Sydney's State theatre His witty style enables him to cover some of the decorative excesses in the Moorish Hindu, cubist and art deco styles of some theatres I especially liked his cool description of "Protective lionesses with light-bulb eyes (which) guard the proscenium" of one theatre

In his introduction, extensively and relevantly illustrated perhaps Thorne's most interesting section relates to the Burley Griffin Capitol Theatre in Melbourne He examines some simplistic descriptions of the theatre as being in art deco and cubist styles, and uses the detail of the theatre to illustrate the dangers of using such terms too loosely Since Thorne's interest in decoration is predominant in this book, art students will find especial value in his major illustrations, which are often related to developing decorative styles and tastes Art nouveau stencils on a 1929 theatre raise some interesting questions, and in any case some of the pictures are breathtakingly extravagant My favourite is one from an "atmospheric" cinema decorated in the Hindu style, with golden elephants rampant supporting a golden idol as a part of the general decoration The details from theatres, metropolitan and provincial, are examined in terms of changing style, and Ross Thorne clearly makes the point that Australia's picture palaces deserve far more attention from both artists and scholars It is to be hoped that such a book will help prevent further mayhem demolition of these 20th Century temples of popular entertainment

Next Month:

Text and Production Casebook of ALMA DE GROEN'S *CHIDLEY*